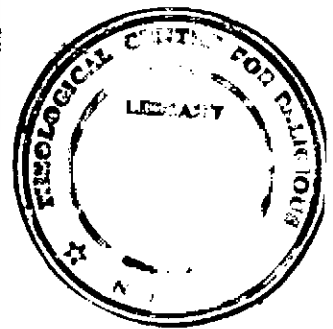


**TANGAZA COLLEGE**

**CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA  
DEPARTMENT OF MISSION STUDIES**

**VOODOO RELIGION AND EVANGELISATION  
IN SOUTHERN BENIN**



**BY**

**GOUMADJE EUSTACHE CODJO**

**MODERATOR: Mr. MULEMI BENSON AZARIAH**

This, is a Long Essay submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
Bachelor of Arts Degree, in Religious Studies

**FEBRUARY, 2000**

**NAIROBI - KENYA**

2000

COD


**THIS IS UNCORRECTED WORK.  
IDEAS OR OPINIONS EXPRESSED  
BY THE WRITER ARE NOT NECESSARILY  
THOSE OF TANGAZA COLLEGE.**

*"It is only when we know our own values and respect what we believe that we can be sure enough to open ourselves to others."*

**(Michael Moloney)**

DECLARATION

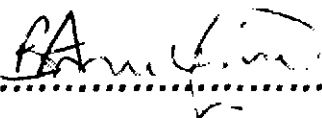
I declare that this essay is my original work and it has not been submitted to any other Institution or University for an academic credit and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

**SIGNATURE:** ..... 

**GOUMADJE Eustache Codjo**

**DATE : 16<sup>th</sup> February 2000**

This essay has been submitted for examination with my approval, as the Moderator.

**SIGNATURE:** ..... 

**Mr. MULEMI Benson Azariah**

**DATE: 16<sup>th</sup> February 2000**

## DEDICATION

With gratitude and sincere appreciation,

I dedicated this work to the loving memory of my **Late Father Mr. GOUMADJE Benoit Goudjo**, who sacrificed all his efforts to help me to be who I am now. May he rest in Peace under God's care. To **my loving Mother Mrs. GOUMADJE Georgette ASSOGBA** in gratitude for her continuous and loving care.

To my Brothers and Sisters, especially **Br Josué-Marie GOUMADJE, O.S.B.** for his constant support.

To **Mrs. ASSOGBA Lucile DOSSOU-YOVO, Mrs. HOUNSOKOU Cathérine HOUNDEKON, Mrs. DOSSOU-YOVO Pascaline HOUNDEKON, and Mrs. CAPO-CHICHI Agnes**, for their support in the very decisive moments of my life.

To all the members of **Holy Cross Youth Group Kariobangi South Catholic Parish**, for their support during my pastoral experience 1995-1999.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely give thanks to God for the gift of life and his endless and constant blessings. I also owe my gratitude and thanks to my **Late father Mr. GOUMADJE Benoit Goudjo** and my Mother **Mrs. GOUMADJE Georgette Assogba**, for their care and love that have made me who I am now. I thank in a special way my loving Brother, **Br Josué-Marie Goumadje, O.S.B.**, for his support and what he has been in my life. My humble gratitude goes to all my Sisters, **GOUMADJE Cécile, Justine, Adèle, Emilienne and the Late Bernadette**, and my Brothers **GOUMADJE Jean-Claude, Romain and Lucien**, who have always been on my side in the journey of life. In a very special way my sincere thanks and gratitude go to **Mrs. CAPO-CHICHI Agnès, Mrs. ASSOGBA Lucile DOSSOU-YOVO, Mr. ASSOGBA Nicodème Mr. and Mrs. Cathérine and Eusèbe HOUNSOKOU, Mr. and Mrs. Pascaline and Paul DOSSOU-YOVO**, for their moral and material support in the very decisive moments of my life.

My humble gratitude is also extended to **Srs. Marie-Thérèse and Marie-Claire (Travailleuses Missionnaires de la famille Donum Dei), SOKEHOUN Généviève and DAKO Valentine (Petites Soeurs de l'Espérance du Christ), BOLOUVIE Rosalie and TAMEGNORI Sabine (Soeurs OCPSP), Dénise SOUCI (SMR,) Bibiane GATO and Philomène Ntambabazi (Cirteciennes Bernardines), Cecily (Precious Blood Sister) and Pascaline (Mary Immaculate Sister)**. The same gratitude goes to **Srs. Maria Fideles (Carmelite Nun), Victorine Silga and Christine Kilela (Carmelite Missionaries), Hanna Mugo, Mamitu and Freweini (CMS).**

My very special thanks to **Frs. Jérôme Mianté, Jonas BEKA and Jérôme Anakese (mccj), Bros. Martin GOUNA and Raphael O. Kpandja (svd), Saturnin POGNON, Tium Debesai ZEWOLD, Paul IDRA,**

**Rafael ARMADA, Roberto C. QUISPE and Miguel A. Posadas (mccj).**

In the same way I thank all those who assisted me in the data for this work and these include Frs. **Ruffino EZAMA, Justin DOSSOU-YOVO,(mccj), Bros. Gérard YELIMO and Alexis BASSOMA (sma), Jean-Paul GUILAWEMDBARKA (M.Afr) and Léopold FANZE (sdb), MM. DOUNON Eloi, ASSOGBA Didier, MAHOUI Yves, d'ALMEIDA Gustave, Miss DEHUITO Eudoxie, Miss FOLLY Martine and Marthe, Miss Akinyi Carolyn DOSSOU-YOVO Sandrine and Fabienne, and Miss Dorothy Masinde.**

I want to register my profound gratitude to my Moderator, **Mr. MULEMI Benson Azariah**, for his concern, kindness, and keen interest shown through the guidance, encouragement and patience in reading and correcting this work.

Finally, I extend my warm gratitude to my colleagues, fellow students and dearest neighbours **Monica Ikonya (Marist Int. Centre), Kileo Nicholas (my Class-mate), Paul Ogallo Onyango, Alex Mutiswa, Michael Ngete, Patrick Kutu, Julius Ituru, James Nyangau, William Ongori, Peter Mutuku and Raphael Kinara (Tangaza college) and George Omwando (Kenyatta University).** I am in the same way very grateful to all those who, have contributed to my well being and achievements, especially the Comboni missionaries of Togo-Ghana-Benin. And to all those who have helped me in one way or another, in bringing this work to its completion, **I SAY THANK YOU, AND MAY GOD BLESS YOU ALL.**

*In Christ and Mary, GOU MADJE Eustache Codjo*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**DECLARATION .....ii**

**DEDICATION .....iii**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... iv**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... vi**

**LIST OF TABLES AND MAPS.....IX**

**INTRODUCTION ..... 1**

**CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY .....5**

**1.0. INTRODUCTION .....5**

**1.1. SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT .....5**

**1.2. THE TRADITIONAL POLITICAL SETTING OF SOUTHERN BENIN .....8**

**1.3. THE TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION IN SOUTHERN BENIN.....10**

**1.4. CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES OF VOODOO RELIGION.....13**

**1.4.1. Voodoo in Benin .....13**

**1.4.2. Voodoo in Haiti .....15**

**1.4.3. Comparative Analysis of the Haitian and Beninese Types of voodoo ..... 16**

<b>CHAPTER TWO: VODOO RELIGION .....</b>	<b>19</b>
2.0. INTRODUCTION .....	19
2.1. DEFINITION OF RELIGION .....	19
2.2. DEFINITION AND ORIGIN OF VODOO RELIGION .....	21
2.2.1. <i>Definition of Voodoo Religion</i> .....	21
2.2.2. <i>The Origin of Voodoo Religion</i> .....	22
2.3. ORGANISATION OF VODOO RELIGION .....	23
2.3.1. <i>The Social Framework of Voodoo: The Clergy and the Adherents</i> .....	23
2.3.2. <i>The Voodoo Sanctuaries</i> .....	25
2.4. THE SUPERNATURAL WORLD IN VODOO RELIGION .....	26
2.5. INITIATION INTO VODOO RELIGION .....	28
2.6. VODOO AND CONVENTIONAL DESCRIPTIONS OF ATR .....	29
2.6.1. <i>Primitive</i> .....	29
2.6.2. <i>Paganism</i> .....	30
2.6.3. <i>Idolatry</i> .....	30
2.6.4. <i>Fetishism</i> .....	31
2.6.5. <i>Animism</i> .....	31
 <b>CHAPTER THREE: VODOO AND CHRISTIANITY .....</b>	 <b>34</b>
3.0. INTRODUCTION .....	34
3.1. THE ATTITUDE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TOWARD VODOO RELIGION .....	34

3.2. VODOO RELIGION AND PROTESTANTISM .....36

3.3. CONVERSION FROM VODOO TO CHRISTIANITY .....37

3.4. SYNCRETISM WITHIN VODOO RELIGION .....39

3.5. VODOO RELIGION AND THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONS .....40

**CHAPTER FOUR: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....43**

4.0. INTRODUCTION .....43

4.1. VODOO PHENOMENON: A MYTH OR A REALITY? .....43

4.2. RELEVANCE OF VODOO VALUES IN THE SOUTHERN BENIN CULTURAL CONTEXT.....46

4.3. VODOOO AND THE REVEALED GOD .....47

4.4. CONCLUSION .....48

4.5. RECOMMENDATIONS .....50

**BIBLIOGRAPHY .....52**

***APPENDIX 1 : TABLES.....54***

***APPENDIX 2 : MAPS.....57***

***APPENDIX 3 : PICTURES.....60***

***APPENDIX 4 : INFORMANTS.....65***

## **LIST OF TABLES AND MAPS**

Religious Changes in West Africa: 1900-1990 .....	54
African Christians recorded by Churches in 1994 .....	55
Public Census And Polls in 1994 .....	56
The Republic of Benin .....	57
The Location of the Adja-Fon in Benin .....	58
The Migration of the Adja-Fon from Nuatcha .....	58
West Africa Catholic Foundations .....	59
Protestant Pioneer Missions in West Africa .....	59

## INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Church has remained for many centuries the "Mission to the Nations" bearing as her main objectives the expansion of the Church and the proclamation of the gospel, the Good News of the Kingdom of God. In the contemporary society, the mission of the Church in the world and in Africa and especially after the African Synod, has been "*Ad Culturas*", that is, the "Mission to the Cultures".

It is in this regard that much research has been done on the African religions and many universities have come to include courses on African Traditional Religion (ATR) in their religious study Programmes. Furthermore, both native African scholars<sup>1</sup> and non-Africans<sup>2</sup> have conducted studies on the topic of Voodoo Religion. However, little has been done to date to consider Voodoo Religion as a great challenge to the Christian Missions in many West African countries, particularly in Benin. It is important to study Voodoo religion because although it is an "Indigenous African Religion which is also widely spread in Latin American countries"<sup>3</sup>, it is still considered by Western scholars as a mere system of beliefs and superstitions and not as a religion as such.

The religious beliefs in voodoo have also been felt within the social as well as political spheres in Latin America. In Benin, "*Voodoo Religion has almost 58% adepts, while the Christians (all denominations included) are about 24% of the population*"<sup>4</sup>. Voodoo religion is, therefore, a great challenge for the Church. This challenge is facilitated by the strong organisation within Voodoo Religion, the attitude of the Christians towards Voodoo practitioners and most probably the favour received by the religion during the seventeen years of "Marxist Leninism" regime of 1972-1989. In the independent Benin (formerly Dahomey), the president was required to take his oath 'before God and the ancestors and official ceremonies were

---

<sup>1</sup> For instance, Adoukonou Barthélémy (1972& 1992), Agbanou Victor (1974), Aguessi Honorat (1980).

<sup>2</sup> Rivière Claude (1980), Gilli Bruno (1979& 1982), Roussé G. Christine (1985).

<sup>3</sup> *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 14, (Washington: The Catholic University of America 1967), p.752.

<sup>4</sup> John, Baur, *Two thousand Years of Christianity in Africa* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), (Nairobi, Pauline Publications Africa, 1998), p.264.

accompanied by libations and offerings to ancestors and the Voodoo gods. All politicians tried to get support of the Voodoo priests who had considerable political influence. In the Revolutionary National Assembly, the religious bodies were to be represented by three Traditionalists, one Muslim, one Catholic and one Protestant. The new government became more and more repressive against the Catholic Church.<sup>5</sup> This favour from the politicians to the Voodoo religion is still growing. *"In 1996 President Nicephore Soglo of Benin instituted a 'National Voodoo day', on the tenth of January. The Benin National assembly supported this. It has given Voodoo Religion an official recognition like other faiths, while maintaining its independence from political regimes"*<sup>6</sup>. That is why Voodoo Religion remains a great challenge for the Church missions in Benin.

The main focus of this essay is to answer the following question: Shall we continue keeping the attitude of rejection towards Voodoo Religion or shall we look into the matter as a new challenge to the Church's mission and see how to face it? We strongly believe that the more we continue to keep a distance or an attitude of rejection against Voodoo Religion and its adherents, the wider the gap between Christianity and Voodoo Religion, a situation, which will open more way for syncretism within Voodoo worship in Benin.

We are aware that one of the challenges of the African Synod is the "urgent need for inculturation". As stated in the final exhortation of Pope John Paul II, on the synod, "Inculturation includes two dimensions; on the one hand, it is the ultimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity, and on the other hand, the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures"<sup>7</sup>. To achieve this objective, we need to have some basic knowledge of the authentic religious values hidden in most African Cultures. This essay thus, presents an anthropological and theological evaluation of Voodoo

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.275.

<sup>6</sup> 'Voodoo in Benin', in *The Courier*, No. 166, (Nov./Dec. 1997), p.32.

<sup>7</sup> Pope John Paul II, *The Church in Africa, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, 'Ecclesia in Africa', (No 59) [Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa], 1995, p.64.

Religion, in order to suggest a new missionary methodology of evangelisation in the Voodoo areas of southern Benin.

This essay is based on personal observations of Voodoo practices as practised and lived by some members of the author's family and friends. Although, the author has never been initiated into Voodoo Religion, this work is based on the evidence of direct non-participant observation. Other data for this essay was collected through in-depth interviews, which were done with some contemporary Voodoo practitioners and some converts to Christianity,(See *Appendix no.4*). This method was used to provide reliable data to support the discussions in this essay. Secondary data was obtained from library research.

This work is divided into four chapters. The first chapter gives some background information on the social, political, and religious context of southern Benin. The last section of this chapter is dedicated to the scope of the influence of Voodoo Religion in West Africa particularly in Benin in comparison to the case of Haiti.

The second chapter presents the nature of Voodoo Religion. Here we give an operational definition of the term "*religion*", before defining and examining the evolution of Voodoo religion. In the same section some conventional descriptions of ATR will be examined. The main emphasis of the chapter two is on the organisation, the rituals, and the system of beliefs in Voodoo religion.

The third chapter is about the interaction between Voodoo religion and Christianity. The emphasis is put on the attitude of Christians towards Voodoo and its adherents. The problem of syncretism within Voodoo religion and its influence on the Christian Missions are also evaluated.

The last chapter presents the summary, conclusion and some recommendations. Here some analysis is made on whether Voodoo Religion is a myth or a reality. We also present some problems, which the new

Christian converts from Voodoo face with regard to the conflicts between their beliefs in Voodoo and the newly embraced Christian faith. In the last section of Chapter four, we examine some values implicit in Voodoo religion and show how these values can be used for successful inculturation in Benin. In this sense, we attempt to provide a model for a shift from the Voodoo concept of God and gods to the revealed God as manifested in Jesus Christ. In the conclusion, we suggest a new methodology of evangelisation in Southern Benin.

We acknowledge the fact that this essay is not exhaustive. This is an explorative presentation to provide some basic information on the relevance of Voodoo to the inculturation process in Southern Benin. This essay is highly relevant to anthropologists, missiologists, missionaries and pastoral agents, who are interested in the social and spiritual development in Benin and other parts of the world, such as Haiti, Cuba, Brazil and Trinidad, where African Traditional Religion still has an influence.

# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

### 1.0. INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Benin is a West African country bordered by Togo to the East, Nigeria to the West, Burkina-Faso and Niger to the North and the Atlantic Ocean to the South (see Map 1). In this chapter, we present the social, cultural, religious and political contexts of this study. The objective of this chapter is to place the analysis of the inculturation concerns in its southern Benin context. Lastly we shall present the scope of influence of Voodoo Religion in contemporary Benin. We shall examine the Voodoo practices, which are becoming part and parcel of the daily life of the people of southern Benin, and especially those living mainly in rural areas.

### 1.1. SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Republic of Benin is composed of the following ethnic groups: "Bariba, Dendi, Betammaribe, Berba and Peul in the North, and Adja, Fon, Yoruba and Mina in the Southern part"<sup>8</sup>. The Adja-Fon group is the largest in the South (Map 2). Originally, "the Adja-Fon migrated from Tado-Nuatcha (Map 3), a region on the Benin-Togo border to form the kingdom of "Danxome" which was to become the strongest kingdom of Benin, formerly known as Dahomey."<sup>9</sup> It is comprised of all the people who speak Adja, Fon, Aïzo, Ouatchi, Holli, Mahi, Popo and Pedah languages. They are heirs of an oral tradition strongly built and deeply rooted in a common perception of life (see diagram 1) Voodoo Religion originated among the Adja-Fon people, who have rich traditions and customs. The analysis of Voodoo in this essay will, therefore, focus on the Adja-Fon people.

<sup>8</sup> Robert, Cornevin, La République Populaire du Benin : Des Origines Dahoméennes à nos Jours, (Paris : Leenhardt & Cie, 1981), p.35.

<sup>9</sup> Barthélémy, Adoukonou, Jalons pour une Théologie Africaine: Essai d'une Herméneutique du Vodun Dahoméen, (Paris: Edts. Lethielleux, 1979), p. XVII.

For the Adja-Fon, human life is central in all activities, and all the Adja-Fon beliefs lie in their philosophy of life. In the Adja-Fon belief systems, the human world is perceived as a great field or realm of forces. The main forces are life and death. From these main forces the following four characteristic roots of the human milieu: 'Gbe-Medji, 'Yeku-Medji, Woli-Medji and Di-Medji<sup>10</sup>, are derived. In general, the Adja-Fon philosophy of life can be summarised in the diagram below:

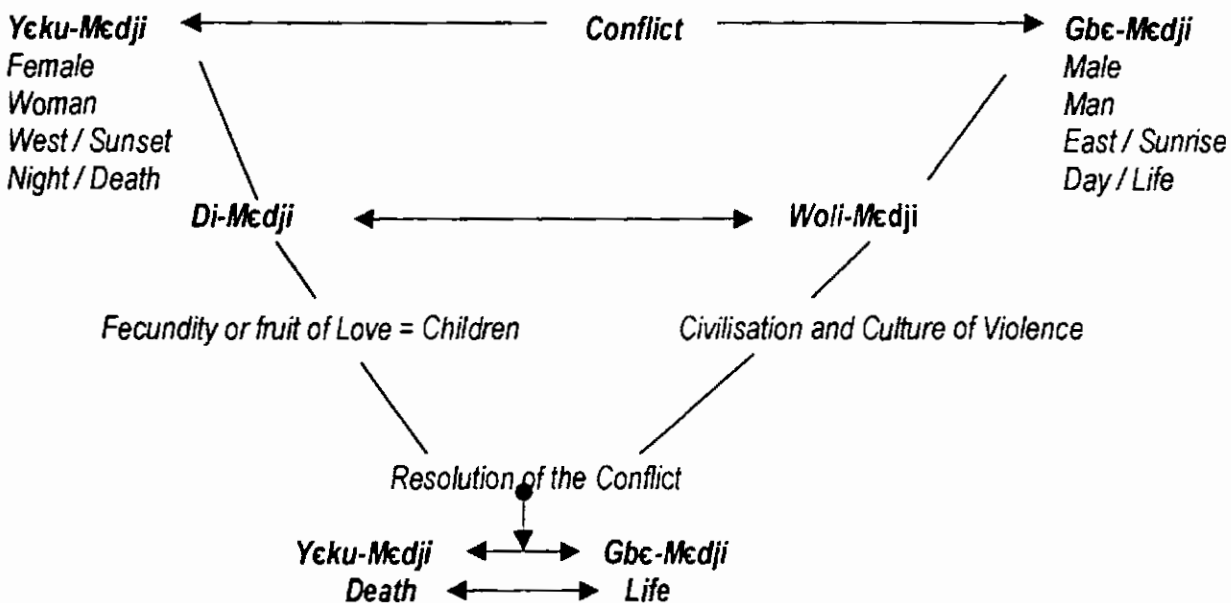


Diagram 1: Representation of the Adja-Fon philosophy of life<sup>11</sup>

Among the Adja-Fon, **Gbe-Medji** is the originator of life or the word, which generates life. It is symbolised by the rising sun, East or the day and its opposition is **Yeku-Medji**, the negation of life, which is death, symbolised by the sunset / West, or the night. In opposition to **Gbe-Medji**, which is a male sign, **Yeku-Medji** is a female sign. **Woli-Medji** represents the civilisation of violence/destruction and **Di-Medji** is the source of fecundity and continuity of love. The human being in the world is situated in a conflict battlefield of "Life and

<sup>10</sup> 'Gbe-Medji' is from the Fon words, **Gbe**, which means 'Word or life (dynamism of existence) and **Medji**, meaning root, origin. Thus, **Gbe-Medji** means, the originator of life **Yeku-Medji**' is from **Yeku**, which means the death of the Soul and **Medji**, so **Yeku-Medji**, means the originator of the death of the soul. '**Woli-Medji** is from **Woli** meaning, divination / oracle and **Medji**. Thus, '**Woli-Medji**' means the original divination. **Di-Medji** is from **Di**, which means Believe and **Medji**. Hence **Di-Medji** means the original Belief

<sup>11</sup> Barthélémy, Adoukonou, *Op. Cit.*, p.106.

death". As a polyvalent agent of life, the human being (Gbeto = father of life) wants by all means to live. He tries to overcome the permanent conflict between life and death through "Di-Medji" that is, fecundity or the fruit of love and source of procreation, and at the same time through "Woli-Medji", which is the culture of violence and civilisation. However, what is important for the Adja-Fon is the final victory of all human beings, which is achieved through life. The world is rooted in the values of life, therefore, being alive or happy for the Adja-Fon is expressed by "Du-Gbe"<sup>12</sup>. Yet this passion for life is shattered at times by the reality of death from which nobody can escape. Thus, to live in happiness is to live in harmony with all the forces of the world. This can be made possible only through constant sacrifices to the Voodoo gods.

This strong sense of respect for life urged the Adja-Fon to develop a sense of a community organised under one head, the king. In the pre-colonial period, the king, who was also the master of everybody and everything in the kingdom, originally headed the society. The entire kingdom was modelled in a hierarchical order with great fear and respect for the authority of the king, who was perceived as a sign of all power on earth. The traditional Adja-Fon society was divided into four groups. The first group comprised of the royal family and their relatives. The second comprised of the dignitaries who were mostly ministers of the kingdom and their relatives. At level three, were the "Anato" (Commoners), who were from the rest of the population. The last class consisted of the slaves, most of whom were prisoners of war.

There also used to be division of labour in the community based on age and sex. Men used to perform tasks such as, farming, fishing and hard manual work, while women took care of the household. This practice still exists in most Beninese rural communities, while the cities have been dominated and changed by modern cross-cultural mentalities and practices. With the encounter with modern cultures and religions, especially Christianity, traditional practices, such as, polygyny, have ceased to be valued, although they are still practised in some traditional rural communities.

---

<sup>12</sup> From 'Du', which means Eat and 'Gbe', life. Thus, 'Du Gbe' means eat life or enjoy life.

This brief socio-cultural background is the basis of the present analysis of the Voodoo Religion and its significance in the evangelisation process in Southern Benin.

**I.2. THE TRADITIONAL POLITICAL SETTING OF SOUTHERN BENIN**

The traditional political structure of Southern Benin can be presented in the diagram below:

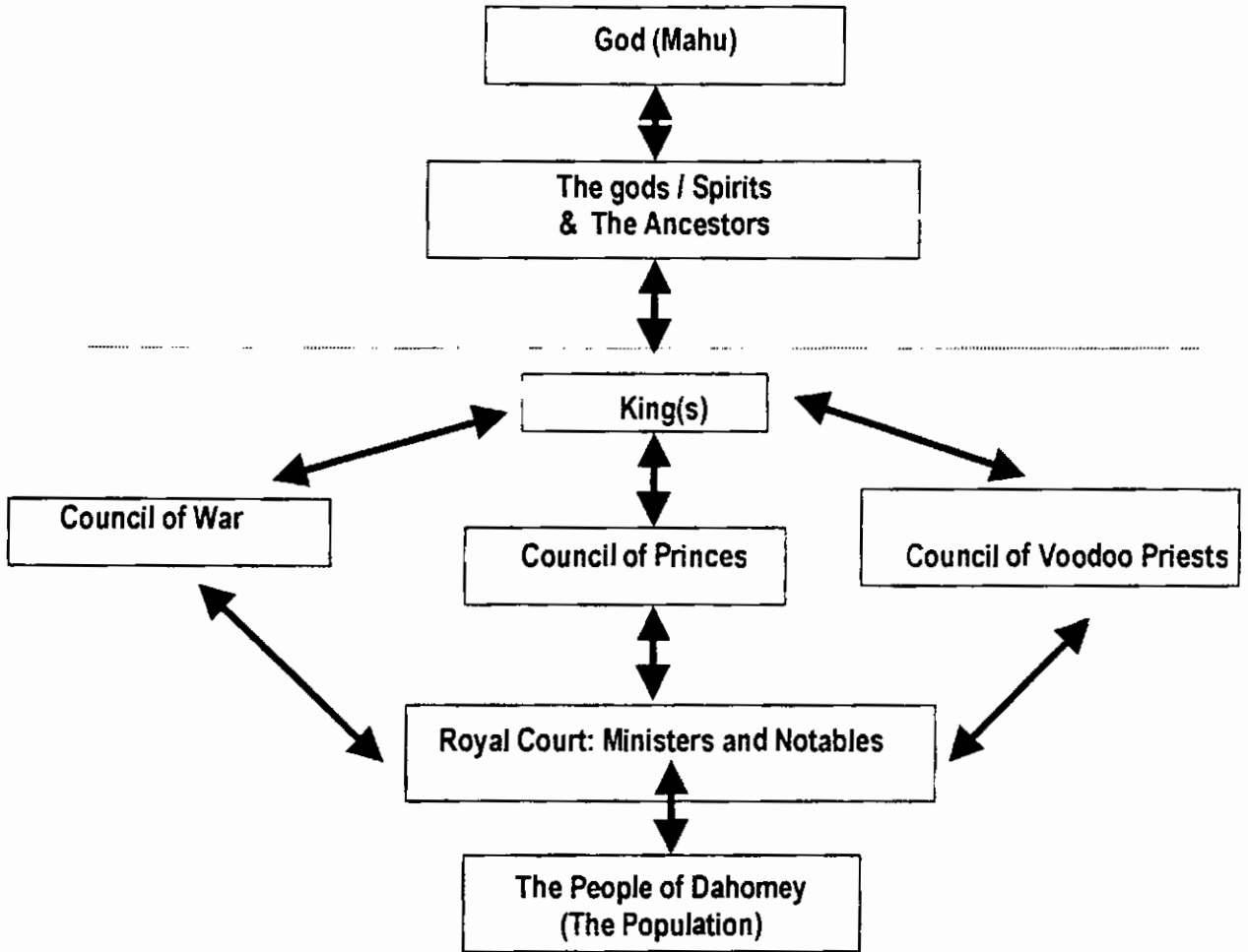


Diagram 2: The traditional socio-political Structure of Southern Benin<sup>13</sup>

During the pre-colonial era, the rigid traditional kingdom of Danxome (Abomey) dominated Southern Benin. The king was the strongest man upon whom everything depended. He was above the law and his main duty was to protect his power and subjects by all means. Furthermore he was believed to owe his authority

<sup>13</sup> Josué-Marie G., *Le Mouvement Missionnaire au XIX<sup>ème</sup> Siècle et l'Évangélisation du Dahomey (Bénin)*, (St. Léger Vauban: Pierre Qui Vire Press, 1994), p.65.

to the ancestors and the gods<sup>14</sup>. The ancestors and the gods/spirits were the direct intermediaries between the human beings and God.

Strong kings were conquerors and they used their power to dominate and control all the surrounding kingdoms, which were defeated in wars. In order to control his kingdom effectively, the king had a Prime Minister who was in charge of administration and the army. Other ministers seconded him, one in charge of the princes and the princesses in matters concerning their social life such as their marriages. Another minister was in charge of foreign affairs such as the negotiations of the king with neighbouring kings. The king's court or his government was made up of seven ministers, whose portfolios include defence, information and State affairs. There were seven ministers, because *"the cosmogony and geomancy require the king to be engaged in a specific activity every day of the week. Depending on their role, each day the ministers had to perform certain tasks to contribute to the kingdom's durability."*<sup>15</sup>

Anyone setting out to learn more about Benin's history and cultural heritage will find a lot to choose from, but the starting point should certainly be a visit to the Museums at Abomey. They will discover the history and organisation of the dynasty of the ancient Kingdom of Danxome with its famous strong kings and its army of women fighters called the 'Amazon Warriors'. *"Abomey is the site of the palaces of the ancient kings of Danxome and one finds there, the vestiges of Dahomey's regal history preserved. The kingdom of Dahomey is still in existence, the hereditary royal line having survived through twelve generations to the modern day."*<sup>16</sup> However, far from being regarded as an opponent of modern political power, the monarchy of the Kingdom of Danxome has contributed to the country's stability. When Dahomey was conquered, the colonial authorities made use of the traditional power base, which had never been called into question. This

---

<sup>14</sup> Barthélémy, Adoukonou, *Jalons pour une Théologie Africaine: Essai d'une herméneutique du Vodun Dahoméen*, (Paris: Edts. Lethielleux, 1979), p.74.

<sup>15</sup> 'Voodoo in Benin', in, *The Courier*, No.166, (Nov/Dec., 1997), p.31

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

was to provide a firmer and stronger foundation for its policies. *"When the country became independent, the Republic's government consulted the Royal Power. Even under the Marxist regime (1972-1989), the important role of preserving and promoting traditional cultures was felt."*<sup>17</sup> The kingdom was well organised with the king as head of all the social groups.

### **1.3. THE TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION IN SOUTHERN BENIN**

Since the Adja-Fon strongly believe that life is primordial, there is a constant need for preserving it by all means. But why do they give such importance to life?

According to Adoukonou, *"the Adja-Fon is a religious being whose thoughts and mind are centred around life ('Gbe')."*<sup>18</sup> Therefore, all activities in traditional religious thought are directed toward preserving life. The Adja-Fon value the growth of life, and anything, which seems to be a threat to life, has to be eliminated or avoided at all costs. The Adja-Fon believe that life is given to human beings within the family or the community circle. Their religious thought is also totally influenced by the strong political organisation within the kingdom of "Danxome" whereby the king was the *'only supreme chief on earth'*.

The political structure has shaped the traditional Beninese religious beliefs and thinking in such a way that each clan or family stands as one under one head. The head of the clan is at the same time the religious authority, the priest or the owner of the Voodoo god of the clan. All the members of the family become automatically adherents of the presumed Voodoo god of the clan. In fact, each clan has its own Voodoo god or deity, which is believed to be the direct intermediary between the living members, the ancestors and the Supreme God. The Voodoo god of the clan is associated with the predominant activity in the family. For instance, the Voodoo god for the farmers' is *'Sakpata'*, which is the god of the earth; the fishermen would have as Voodoo gods, *'Xou' and 'Mamiwater'*, the god and goddess of the sea, rivers, and oceans. The

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Barthélémy, Adoukonou, *Jalons pour une Théologie Africaine: Essai d'une herméneutique du Vodun Dahoméen*, (Paris: Ed. Lethielleux, 1979), p.132.

Voodoo god 'Gou' is the god considered to be the protector of wars and of the blacksmith as well as all those who use metallic instruments in their work and activities. The dead members of a family are respected and venerated because the Adja-Fon believe that the dead may soon or later become ancestors and even Voodoo gods.

The Adja-Fon also believe that the world is one. In this regard, everybody and everything that exists are interconnected and live in harmony within the world's ecosystem. Therefore the desire to keep order around themselves relates the Adja-Fon to the Supreme Being, through the mediation of the divinities or Voodoo gods. Although the Adja-Fon believe in the existence of a Supreme Being whom they refer to as Mahu<sup>19</sup>, they do not adore and offer any sacrifice to him directly.

Apart from Voodoo, the traditional religion that still has almost 60% of the population, Christianity is gradually winning the hearts of many Beninese. Christianity had less than 7% of the population in 1900. The number of Christians rose to 26% of the total population in 1990<sup>20</sup>. The Muslims are currently around 14% of the total population. Though Christianity was introduced in Benin in the middle of the nineteenth century, the process of evangelisation appears to be very slow and rather superficial. This slow process is probably due to the methodology used by the first missionaries in Benin and in many other African countries. In fact, the first missionaries came with the idea of bringing to the people a new civilisation based on Christianity. Thus they did not explore the existing cultures so as to make use of the values in the local beliefs.

In the Seventeenth century, the first missionaries attempted to evangelise the Republic of Benin (see *Map 4*). "In 1667, two Capuchin missionaries arrived at the coast region of Jubal (Ouidah), but unfortunately they

---

<sup>19</sup> From 'Ma'= to share; 'Wu'= body. Thus "Mahu" means the one from whom all that exist, proceed and have their existence

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *La République du Benin "revised Fascicules"*, Cotonou, 1992, (see also Table 1).

died after a short while of yellow fever. Later on two Dominicans attempted to start a mission in the central region of Ardres (Allada), but they too failed the same way.<sup>21</sup> From there on, the republic of Benin did not have missionaries except some French and Portuguese priests who used to accompany the slave merchants on their journeys, until 1860 when Pope Pius IX erected the Vicariate of Dahomey, which was entrusted to the Society of African missions (SMA)). Thereafter, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1861, the first SMA Missionaries, Frs. Francis Borghero from Italy, Fernandez Francis from Spain and Luis Edde from France were sent to Benin where they opened the first mission on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1861, the Ascension of the Lord. *“Fr. Borghero, the superior of the mission did not despair about the chances of conversion among the local people. However, he soon realised two great obstacles to the work of evangelisation. These obstacles are the influence that Voodoo religion had at that time and the fear of the people to approach the white missionaries.”*<sup>22</sup> These problems made the beginning of mission activities in the Republic of Benin. There was also a kind of hostility between the faithful Christianity and Voodoo religion. This hostility has remained for many years in the minds of the people, making the spreading of the good news of the gospel a hard task in the Republic of Benin.

As stated in the first code imposed on the people of Benin, an inflexible mission approach was adopted, as partly seen in the following statement: *“Let us forbid any public worship of other religions than the Roman Catholic and Apostolic. We want that all that intend to rebel against this law be punished. Let us defend our faith by abolishing and forbidding all religious gatherings, which appear illicit. The promoters of any religious faith apart from Catholicism will be severely punished.”*<sup>23</sup> This methodology and attitude created in the hearts of the indigenous Benin people hatred and attitude of resentment towards any new religion,

<sup>21</sup> Josué-Marie, G., Le Mouvement Missionnaire au XIX<sup>ème</sup> Siècle et l'Évangélisation du Dahomey(Bénin), (St. Léger - Vauban: Pierre Qui Vire Press, 1994), p.46.

<sup>22</sup> Baur, John, Two thousand Years of Christianity in Africa (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1998), p.143.

<sup>23</sup> Josué-Marie G., Le Mouvement Missionnaire au XIX<sup>ème</sup> Siècle et l'Évangélisation du Dahomey(Bénin), (St. Léger-Vauban: Pierre Qui Vire Press, 1994), p.39 ; Montilus, Guern, Le Vodun Fon: Ses images et symboles, (Cotonou , 1972), p. 289.

which seemed to be in opposition to their traditional Voodoo beliefs. That is why Voodoo Religion remains alive and strong in Southern Benin despite the tremendous work of evangelisation.

## **1.4. CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES OF VODOO RELIGION**

Nowadays, Voodoo Religion has taken effective roots among many cultures due to its strong organisation and system of beliefs. Although Voodoo is a traditional African Religion, influenced by practices borrowed from Christianity, it has slowly spread among the peasants of some Latin American countries especially in Haiti where Voodoo has become a popular religion. Alfred states that, "Voodoo Religion belongs to our modern world, its language and ritual derived from French and its divinities move at the pace of our industrialised time. Thus it is part and parcel of our civilisation"<sup>24</sup>. The question in this regard is, what then are the factors, which have facilitated the spread of Voodoo religion in the modern society?

We have chosen to present the contemporary practices of Voodoo from the experiences of Benin and Haiti. On one hand, Haiti is one of the Latin American countries where Voodoo has become a popular religion. On the other hand, the cases of Haiti and Benin are compared here because Haitians and Beninese have similar cultural orientations. Nevertheless, we have to acknowledge the fact that, Voodoo religion has a wider scope beyond Benin and Haiti. It is being practised in most of the West African countries as well as Trinidad, Brazil and Chile in Latin America.

### **1.4.1. Voodoo in Benin.**

Due to its strong organisation, Voodoo Religion has survived all attempts from Christianity and Islam to put an end to the traditional religion of the Benin people. The seventeen years of Marxist regime (1972-1989) favoured Voodoo Religion mainly because of the fact that the majority of its adherents were peasants and easy to be manipulated. The political leaders developed strategies in favour of promoting the cultural

---

<sup>24</sup> Alfred , Metraux, *Le Vodun Haitien*, (Paris: Atelier SEPC, 1977), p.29

values and heritage of the local people, in order to have the majority of the population on their side. Furthermore, Benin is the only country in West Africa where Voodoo religion has been officially recognised and given a national feast day. Since 1996, January 10<sup>th</sup> has been declared a "public holiday", a day given for the celebration of the Voodoo cults throughout the country. This has led to a formation of a national conference or committee of Voodoo-priests with "Daagbo Xounon"<sup>25</sup> as the leader and high priest. His main role has been to keep harmony and unity among the different Voodoo temples, their priests and adherents. Daagbo Xounon is the one who is consulted in times of difficulties, such as, drought and any other important moments in the life of the population countrywide.

Benin had been a cradle of Voodoo-cults and the meeting point of all cultures derived from Voodoo beliefs. In 1992, there was the first historical meeting in the Benin coastal City of Ouidah, between the practitioners of Voodoo from Africa and the Americas (Haiti, Brazil, Cuba, Chile, and Trinidad). The purpose of the meeting was to reconcile the different Voodoo cultures and to foster a good relationship and communion among the Voodoo adherents. It was also an opportunity for the other Voodoo practitioners such as, Haitians, Cubans, Brazilians and Chileans, to go back to the very roots of their cultures. The celebration lasted a week and included the participation of political leaders as well. *"Voodoo religion has ever since been renewed in Benin and it still has 60% of the 6.5 million inhabitants of the Republic of Benin. Today Christians are 26% and Muslims 14% of the total population. Benin has been involved in Voodoo Religion which has been supported by the political leaders."*<sup>26</sup> A striking feature in the Beninese City of Ouidah is the famous Temple of snakes. *"The site was one of the embarkation points for slaves and is now the centre of Voodoo cult. Different religions co-exist and there is a remarkable sacred-python temple."*<sup>27</sup> Ouidah has in fact, a sanctuary for the voodoo god snakes called 'Dan,' symbolised by the rainbow, is the god of fertility and perpetual movement.

---

<sup>25</sup> Daagbo means Grand father, ancestor. Xounon =Owner of the sea-god.

<sup>26</sup> Eglise de Cotonou, (Avril-Mai 1999).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

### 1.4.2. Voodoo in Haiti

Haitian Voodoo originated from Africa and especially from Benin. The slaves taken from the coast of Guinea carried with themselves a rich cultural and religious heritage. Despite the fact that they were away in diaspora, they managed to keep alive the traditional religious beliefs of their African ancestors. Their perseverance and endurance helped them to strengthen their traditional religious sense and keep alive their cultural heritage. Progressively, the African slaves managed to spread their traditional faith among the local Haitian peasants who responded positively through easy acceptance of Voodoo to the extent of being deeply rooted into its beliefs.

*"To serve Voodoo, you have to be a Catholic"*<sup>28</sup>. These words of a peasant of Marbial in Haiti, express the influence that Voodoo religion has had among Haitian Christians. Nowadays, the Haitian peasants in offering a sacrifice to their 'Loa' or Voodoo god, do not think that their acts are against the prescriptions of the Catholic Church nor against their faith in Jesus Christ. Voodoo is for them a familiar and friendly religion. Voodoo beliefs have taken root in the hearts of the majority of the Haitian population to the extent that, even the practitioners and devoted Catholics (formerly Voodoo adherents) find it difficult to totally abandon their Voodoo beliefs. Some openly confess that *"they will always be faithful to the Catholic Church, yet nothing on earth, under the sun can separate them from Loa cults which have always protected them and their families from any danger in life"*<sup>29</sup>. Furthermore, the modern "Hounsi" (adepts of Voodoo) have always found it all right to attend Mass on Sunday, even after dancing and celebrating Voodoo throughout the previous night. They do not find it scandalising to see a "Houngan" (voodoo priest) walking beside a parish priest during mass processions on special feast days. This has been a great challenge to foreign missionaries who have found it hard to accept it and understand such a syncretic mentality. Although Voodoo religion still has many adherents in Haiti, *"some Haitians find it hard to accept and tend to*

---

<sup>28</sup> Alfred, Metraux, Le Vodun Haitien, Paris: Atelier SEPC, 1977, p.287

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.287.

consider Voodoo religion as curse and punishment of God on their country"<sup>30</sup>.

With the increase of the Christian population in Haiti, there have been many campaigns against Voodoo Religion. While the Catholic Church is still looking for peaceful and non-violent ways of counteracting the Voodoo cults, the Protestants have used a strong methodology of convincing the Voodoo adherents to turn away from their traditional beliefs. They have created awareness among the peasants regarding the cost of the celebrations and the sacrifices to the '*Loa*'. It is obvious, in fact, that any Voodoo cult or ritual is a heavy economic burden to the poor peasants in Haiti and West Africa. However, the right methodology and approach to change the people's attitude should not be in the form of violent campaigns against Voodoo Religion. There is need for dialogue, and mutual respect and understanding between Christianity and Voodoo Religion for an effective and successful process of Inculturation in Benin and other areas where the traditional beliefs still have strong impact on the lives of the local people.

#### **1.4.3. Comparative analysis of Haitian and Beninese types of Voodoo**

There are undeniable similarities between the Haitian and the Benin types of Voodoo. The Haitian initiation to Voodoo for example still reproduces the scheme of its 'Beninese prototype'. However, some transformations have occurred in the personalities and attributes of the gods in Haitian Voodoo as compared to the Beninese type. In Fon mythology for instance, '*Legba*', as the interpreter to the gods, fulfils a function of primordial importance in the whole system of religion. Legba alone can deliver the messages of the gods and interpret their will in human languages. He is also the god of destiny, an intermediary between human beings and the other gods and he is honoured first at every ceremony and receives the first offerings. While in Haiti. *"recalling vaguely his role as divine messenger, the Voodooists have made a sort of doorman out of Legba, the supernatural guardian of houses and to an even greater extent of roads, paths and crossroads. Legba has lost much of his majesty, but in exchange he has*

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.318.

acquired new functions."<sup>31</sup>

In the same way, in Haiti, '*Damballah Wedo*', the snake god, is the spirit that haunts springs and climbs on the trees, whereas in Benin, he is described as '*Dan Aido Hwedo*', that is, the god all life and motion. The case of the god '*Aizan*' provides another example of the way in which Haitian Voodooists have distorted Beninese mythology. *"In Haiti, 'Aizan' is a divinity who is represented as an old woman and who as Legba's wife, protects markets, public places, doors and barriers. She is said to be the oldest of all the divinities and is entitled to the first offerings. In Benin Aizan is the name given to the spirits older than the mythical founders of the Adja-Fon ethnic group."*<sup>32</sup>

In Haitian Voodoo, therefore, there are many traces of Beninese mythology and its rich tradition, but there are some modifications, which have impoverished Voodoo beliefs to the extent of being gradually unrecognisable. In Haiti, the voodoo gods become genies and spirits. Indeed, the Haitians are the descendants of the slaves taken from the Guinea coast of West Africa who survived after the abolition of the slave trade. Due to the African origin of most Haitians, *"the culture of Benin in Haiti has survived not only in the domains of religion and in certain aspects of economic life, but also in such subtle forms by behaviour such as gestures and facial expressions."*<sup>33</sup>

We have realised through this brief examination of the background and the context of this study that, there is one reality, which embraces the life of the traditional Beninese, that is, Voodoo religion. This religious phenomenon has influenced all the aspects of the life of the Beninese people throughout the ages. Motivated by the inner drive toward the Voodoo religion, the southern Beninese are eager to live in harmony with everything that exists in the world. For this reason, they give great importance to life, which

---

<sup>31</sup> Alfred, Metraux, Op. Cit., p.361

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.362.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

they consider as primordial. The people of Southern Benin revere all that surround them and believe that everything in the world has a mysterious power. This belief has led the native Beninese to consider all forces that they cannot grasp as voodoo gods. This conception of life and nature has influenced the socio-political, cultural and religious dimensions of their life. The first seed of Evangelisation was, therefore, sown in this ground of strong traditional religious experience. The first missionaries failed to grasp the existing culture and its system of beliefs in depth. After almost two centuries of evangelisation, the majority of the people of Benin are still deeply rooted in the powerful and well-organised Voodoo religion. The question to be answered, therefore is what makes Voodoo religion so powerful and a challenge to the work of evangelisation in Southern Benin?

## CHAPTER TWO

# VOODOO RELIGION

### 2.0. Introduction

In this chapter, we will present Voodoo Religion in terms of its definition, origin organisation and beliefs. Our main task is to provide an overview of Voodoo as it is. From the definition of religion, we will present Voodoo within the framework of ATR. Here, we present a brief evaluation of some of the scholars' views about Voodoo religion in order to contribute to an understanding of its meaning.

### 2.1. DEFINITION OF RELIGION

The word '*religion*' may seem easy to define or grasp as regards its meaning. However, even the scholars who have attempted to elucidate or give an exhaustive definition of religion could not find a standard approach to defining the word. According to Idowu, "*by now everybody who is seriously engaged in the study of religion has been convinced that to attempt a definition of the term is an almost impossible, if not altogether impossible task. And every serious scholar is on the verge of giving up the task.*"<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, many attempts have been made to give some working definitions of religion. One problem about the definition of religion is that, authors do not make their position with regard to religious or philosophical convictions clear. We have to keep on reminding ourselves that the adherents of religions mostly practice their beliefs without bothering themselves with definitions.

As it is defined in Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, "*religion is the belief in the existence of a god or gods who has/have created nature, which continues to exist after the death of the body.*" It can also be defined as a "*particular system of faith and worship based on such a belief.*"<sup>35</sup> According to Marx Muller, "*religion is a perception of the infinite.*"<sup>36</sup> At the first glance the definition of Marx Muller is attractive because it can imply a psychic activity of the whole person. At the same time, it can also signify an object of perception, which is real. But after a careful thought, Muller's definition appears to be vague. The infinite

<sup>34</sup> Bolaji. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion : A Definition*, (London : SMC Press, 1973), p.69

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1064

needs to be defined clearly and perception may suggest subjectivity and passivity rather than objectivity and activity. It is obvious that one is not just religious by merely perceiving and not doing something purposeful with intelligence about what is perceived. For Kant, *religion is "a recognition of our duties as divine commands. It is the belief, which sets what is essential in all adoration of God in human morality. Religion is the law in us, is so far as it obtains emphasis from a lawgiver and judge over us. It is a morality directed to the recognition of God."*<sup>37</sup>

Kant's definition gives us the impression that, the conception of the Godhead arose from the consciousness of the moral law, the divine imperative in human beings. In fact, religion is usually based upon a relationship, which is covenantal. This is well illustrated in the Old and New Testaments, as well as in ATR. Human beings must first recognise the determiner of destiny before accepting the lawgiver in him. The scripture affirms this in the following passage, *"Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love him with all your soul and might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today, in your heart ... Bind them as a sign on your hand. And fix them as an emblem on your forehead"*(Deut.6: 4-6.8). It is only when this is the regular order of things that moral demands can be appreciated and moral duties rightly fulfilled.

According to Idowu, *"religion is the means by which God as spirit (invisible) and human being's essential self communicate. It is something resulting from the relationship which God has established from the beginning of human life, between Himself and human beings."*<sup>38</sup> From all these definitions, the term religion refers to an ultimate fact of the human nature and, therefore, it is the whole person that is involved in it. Furthermore, every religion claims a transcendental origin. If we do not start with God, we cannot reach Him. It is with this in mind and sight that we shall analyse and evaluate the place of Voodoo religion in the process of inculturation in Southern Benin. In this essay, Voodoo religion is examined as an ATR.

<sup>36</sup> Marx Muller quoted by Bolaji, Idowu, *African traditional religion, A definition*, (London : SMC Press, 1973), p.70

<sup>37</sup> Emmanuel Kant quoted by Bolaji, Idowu, *African traditional religion, A definition*, (London : SMC Press, 1973), pp.70-71.

<sup>38</sup> Bolaji, Idowu *Op. cit.*, p.75

## 2.2. DEFINITION AND ORIGIN OF VODOO RELIGION

### II.2.1 Definition of Voodoo Religion

As defined in the Catholic Encyclopedia, "Voodoo is a set of beliefs and rites, African in its origin, but closely interwoven with practices borrowed from Christianity. It constitutes the living religion of both rural and urban masses in most West African countries,"<sup>39</sup> especially in Benin, the area of this study. The word Voodoo originates from the Fon<sup>40</sup> word 'Vodun', which the Adja-Fon people use to refer to "every mysterious manifestation, monstrosity or phenomenon, which is beyond their imagination or intelligence."<sup>41</sup> Voodoo is in fact a mysterious reality, a mixture of beliefs in the sacred and the profane. It is, therefore, not easy at all to get at glance the real meaning of the term Voodoo. In this regard, it is important to consider some expressions and terms related to it, which some scholars and many people who have conducted studies on this subject matter have commonly used.

According to Fr. Gabriel Kiti, "Mahu<sup>42</sup> is the king and the Voodoo are his ministers in the world. Mahu is like a master and the Voodoo are his servants."<sup>43</sup> In the same line, Maupoil states that "Voodoo is a mysterious reality for all in every place and moment. It is indeed something, which concerns the divine, for the fact that Mahu is part and parcel of his creation. He is omnipresent though invisible."<sup>44</sup> Le Hérissé holds that, "Voodoo are not the intermediaries between Mahu and human beings, but they are the free and independent agents of Mahu. They are, therefore, responsible and sole judges of their actions on earth. It is Mahu who created everything including the Voodoo and put the world under their guidance and care."<sup>45</sup>

All the attempts of defining Voodoo religion give only an analogy of what Voodoo is. Yet we are not really convinced, as the authors seem to remain on a rather superficial level regarding the meaning of the term

<sup>39</sup> New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol.14, p.752

<sup>40</sup> Fon is the local dialect of the leading ethnic group of Benin Republic. The Fon people are found in the Southern and Central part of the Country (see Map 2).

<sup>41</sup> Basile, Segurola, Dictionnaire Fon-Français, Vol.2, (Cotonou: Centre Catéchétique, 1988), p.552

<sup>42</sup> Mahu is the Fon name for God, or the Supreme Being.

<sup>43</sup> Gabriel, Kiti, quoted by B., Adoukonou, Jalons pour une Théologie Africaine: Essai d'une Herméneutique Chrétienne du Voodoo Dahoméen, Paris: Leshielleux, 1980, p.56

<sup>44</sup> Maupoil, B., La Géomancie a l'ancienne Côte des Esclaves, (Note 1) p.54

<sup>45</sup> Le Hérissé, L'ancien royaume du Dahomey, quoted by B., Gili, Naissances Humaines ou Divines?, (Lomé: Editions Haho, 1997), p.5

Voodoo. Indeed, it is not easy to define Voodoo, unless it is put into its semantic field. It is only in analogy to other related words that we can grasp to some extent the meaning of this mysterious Voodoo reality. In his attempt to give a definition of the term Voodoo, Adoukonou<sup>46</sup> uses some analogical terms such as "*Nunsinnu*", which literally means a thing symbolising another one. Thus, to know the real thing, there is a need of an intermediary either the *Hounnon*, who is the Voodoo priest or the *Bokonon*<sup>47</sup>. He also uses the term "*Nubudo*" meaning a lost thing, a hole an origin, that is something, which is beyond human understanding, or "*Nugongon*", which means a deep thing. There is a common saying, which states, "*Vodun gongon, Vodun d'ablu*"<sup>48</sup>. That is Voodoo is deep and obscure. Similarly Adoukonou uses the term "*Nubadabada*", which literally means strange, awesome and a troublesome thing. He finally uses "*Numensen*", that is, a thing, which is adored or honoured.

These analogical terms imply that Voodoo is a mysterious reality denoting the sacred as well as connoting the profane at the same time. Furthermore, Voodoo gods are for the Adja-fo, friends and intermediaries between God and human beings. In general, Voodoo gods can be classified into three categories. There are the "*Tovodun*"<sup>49</sup>, or national divinities, and the divinities of the masses. These are the popular Voodoo gods, which are worshiped by everybody. Secondly, there are the "*Akovodun*"<sup>50</sup>, or ethnic divinities; that is, the Voodoo gods of the people belonging to the same ancestral root. Thirdly, there are the "*Hennuvodun*"<sup>51</sup>, which are the family divinities or domestic Voodoo gods. In this case, the father or the head of the household acts automatically, as priest or priestess<sup>52</sup> and the members of the family are adherents by birth.

## 2.2.2. The Origin of Voodoo Religion

According to Fon Mythology, Voodoo has its origin in the very beginning human existence. This implies

<sup>46</sup> Barthelemy Adoukonou, *Jalons pour une Théologie Africaine: Essai d'une herméneutique Chrétienne du Voodoo Dahoméen*, (Paris: Leshielleux, 1980), pp.63-65

<sup>47</sup> Bokonon ((Diviner) is the one in charge of consultation in a Voodoo temple.

<sup>48</sup> Basile Segurola, *Dictionnaire Fon-Français*, Vol.2 (3rdEd), (Cotonou: Centre Catechetique, 1988), p.553

<sup>49</sup> To, means in the Fon dialect, Country, Nation, River, Vodun (Voodoo), the divinity, thus '*Tovodun*' means the voodoo of the country, the river, etc ...

<sup>50</sup> Ako means ethnic group, hence Akovodun means the ethnic voodoo god.

<sup>51</sup> Henuu, is the household, the family, thus hennuvodun means the voodoo of the household.

<sup>52</sup> Priest in case of patrilinear families and priestess in matrilineal families.

that Voodoo religion is as old as humanity. It started among the Adja-Fon people of Benin and Togo. Originally, a Voodoo god used to be identified with a human being, incarnating a mysterious power of a spirit. It is expressed through this popular phrase "*Gbeto wε nyi Vodun*", that is, Voodoo god is a human being. Quite often the term Voodoo is also used to praise someone's qualities. For instance, "*Vodun o nε*", or "*Vodunvi o nε*" means, *that one is the Voodoo, the famous man, the hero, the man of the day, the star.*<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, some common expressions or terms can also explain how Voodoo came to be an object of cult for the Adja-Fon. One can often hear people saying, "*Mε wε no do e nyi Vodun b'ε no nyi Vodun*". It is a man who names it Voodoo god before it can be called Voodoo god.

## 2.3. ORGANISATION OF VOODOO RELIGION

### 2.3.1. The Social Framework of Voodoo: The Clergy and the adherents

Voodoo has nowadays become a popular religion in Benin. A large number of its adherents are recruited from the peasants, who form almost eighty per cent of the population of the Republic of Benin. The number of Voodoo adherents up to date is around 58%<sup>54</sup> to 60%<sup>55</sup> of the total population. The City dwellers have remained faithful to Voodoo in proportion to the level at which they have kept up their rural roots.

In the traditional set up, Voodoo religion is derived from the political and social organisation of the ancient kingdom of Danxome (see diagram 2). Each household was constituted of the family consisting of the head, his wife or wives or her husband in matrilineal family, the children, married or unmarried and the grandchildren. A group of conjugal families closely related can also form the *Xwedo* (homestead). The members of the *xwedo* were further bound together by worship of their common ancestry voodoo god.

Nowadays, Voodoo religion has gone beyond the frontiers or boundaries of the traditional household and it has indeed taken the dimension of public and popular worship and is no longer the domain of few individuals. It is interesting that Voodoo has preserved one of the fundamental characteristics of the African

<sup>53</sup> Barthélémy Adoukonou, *Jalons pour une Théologie Africaine: Essai d'une Herméneutique Chrétienne du Voodoo Dahoméen*, (Paris: Edit .Leshielleux, 1980), P.6€

<sup>54</sup> John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, (Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 1998), p.264

<sup>55</sup> Statistics as in *Eglise de Cotonou*, (Avril-Mai 1999).

traditional religion, that is, worship is sustained by group of adherents who voluntarily place themselves under the authority of a priest or priestess whose sanctuary they frequent. The adherents who have been initiated in the same sanctuary form a sort of fraternity called *Humfo* or *Vodunkpame*<sup>56</sup>. The importance of the cult-group depends to a great extent upon the personality and influence of the priest or the priestess. There is a kind of hierarchy in each and every voodoo temple or sanctuary. In the first place, there is the Houngan or Vodunnon (*the chief or high priest / priestess and owner of the voodoo*), who is directly responsible for the adherents of the voodoo god venerated in his / her sanctuary. He / she is entrusted with any sacrifice to be offered to the voodoo god and the instructions to be given to the adherents, especially the novices or candidates for initiation.

The "Houngan" or chief-priest / priestess can be chosen from among the eldest believers, but most of the time his / her election is hereditary. The old-Houngan can confer the ministry to his heir who can be one of his sons or a member of his family. The profession of the Houngan corresponds with the various degrees of initiation. A priest or priestess has authority only over those who voluntarily offer themselves as servants of the voodoo of a given sanctuary. Nevertheless, *"some priests enjoy the reputation, which does not go beyond their sanctuary, while others attract crowds and are known all over the country, let us take for instance the case of Daagbo Xounon, the voodoo high priest of the republic of Benin."*<sup>57</sup> The Priestly Vocation in Voodoo religion is interpreted as a call from the voodoo god itself. *"Spirits who have chosen a person to be a priest or priestess of a sanctuary make their will known to him or her. This can either be by the utterances of the possessed or a symbolic dream, 'Hun we non so me', that means, it is the voodoo god who chooses a person."*<sup>58</sup> All the candidates to the priesthood, the future Houngan from different sanctuaries are put under the care of a chosen Houngan, who is in charge of their formation and instructions which can last for many years. During these years, the future Houngan gradually acquire the techniques of their profession. The transmission of the techniques can be done through magical objects.

After the Houngan, we have the dignitaries of the Voodoo sanctuary or the Humfo. These are the initiated

<sup>56</sup> Vodunkpame is composed of Vodun (voodoo) and kpame, which means house or convent. Thus Vodunkpame literally means the house of the voodoo god or the convent.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Daa Gankpa L., Houedanou, (61 years old), Priest of the Voodoo god 'Sakpata', Toffo (Benin); 15<sup>th</sup> June 1999

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*.

men and women who regularly take an active part in ceremonies and who help the priest / priestess in his / her functions. Together with the Houngan, they make up a little court or a society sworn to the worship of the voodoo god. There are the rest of the adherents, the '*Hounsi*' (the spouses) of the voodoo god. A Hounsi is committed to offer sacrifices to the voodoo god of the Humfo. He/she also devotes him/herself to the humblest tasks with no hope of reward beyond the friendship and protection of the voodoo god as well as living in dread of divine punishment should he/she prove negligent. Zeal and devotion to the Houngan and obedience are the qualities expected in general from a '*Hounsi*' (see picture 10).

### 2.3.2. The Voodoo Sanctuaries

The voodoo sanctuary is called '*Humfo*'. It is not just a temple in the ordinary sense of the word, but a kind of a court where a large number of people can gather and worship a particular voodoo god. It is somehow a religious centre comparable in appearance to a traditional homestead including the household of an extended family. In general, the Humfo consists of a covered area and a main building which shelters the voodoo god worshipped in the sanctuary (see picture 1). It also serves as a house for the family of the chief-priest or priestess. Its roof is either thatched or made of corrugated iron sheets and held up by brilliantly painted pillars and a central pillar, representing the presence of the spirit and a place of sacrifice in the temple. In rituals, the sanctuary serves as a passage for the voodoo god. Apart from the feasts and voodoo ceremonies, nothing except the drums hanging from the hooks on the ceiling would suggest that such a place is the scene of the most spectacular manifestations of Voodoo religion

The sanctuary itself is a single small room backed by one or more stonework altars, called '*kpe*'. On the table of certain altars, there are sinks prepared for the needs of aquatic spirits. In some Humfo, the altars are arranged in tiers, which make it easier to place things as well as to increase the number of holy ritual objects, such as jars and jugs belonging to the voodoo god (see pictures 2 & 3). In many Humfo, there is a special place where the future Houngan are confined during their initiation and formation. Sacred trees, which may be recognised by the stones edging around them as well as some straw sacks, encircle every Humfo and even carcasses of animals hung up in their branches. The voodoo god '*Legba*' guards the entrance of most sanctuaries. Finally, the picture of a sanctuary would be incomplete without mentioning the cocks, hens, pigeons and guinea fowl which run about outside perching on the sacred trees and waiting

for the day of sacrifices. There can also be found some goats, whose bleating may be heard from a nearby enclosure.

## 2.4. THE SUPERNATURAL WORLD IN VOODOO RELIGION

Voodoo worshipers believe in one supreme God called '*Mahu*'<sup>59</sup>, who is too good, merciful, slow to anger and abiding in love. He is the creator of all that exist. They also believe in numerous gods or spirits called voodoo gods to whom particular cults are dedicated. The Supreme Being is believed to be remote and superior to everything. He is far away from human beings, and cannot communicate directly with them unless through the divinities with whom he shares his power. Therefore, he is not worshipped, unless through the other divinities. As stated by Theilhard, "*the Supreme Being is not worshipped by the Africans. They in fact leave him aside, for he is remote and inaccessible. They believe in him as the judge and lawgiver. Thus he needs to be respected through the divinities with which he shares his power.*"<sup>60</sup> Communication between Voodooists and the supernatural world is effected through possession. The believer becomes the instrument, or the horse of a spirit and displays in his new personality a behaviour that has sometimes been characterised as hysteric.

In the voodoo pantheon, the Principal voodoo gods are the following:

- *Hevioso*: the god of thunder, always represented by a bull. He is the god of farmers and peasants. He is believed to be the source of rain and good harvests.
- *Sakpata*: the god of the earth, who is in direct contact with human beings and is the source of all sickness related to the earth.
- *Dan*: the *Snake god or rainbow* (see pictures 4 & 5), who is considered as the link between heaven and earth. He is the god of fecundity and perpetual movement. The cult of "Dan" is particularly celebrated in the coastal region Ouidah. '*Dan*' is a spiral around the earth and holds it together.
- *Xou* (Sea god) is the god of water, rivers, seas and oceans.

Among the secondary Voodoo gods, there are:

<sup>59</sup> Mahu means, the one from whom everything proceeds. Actually, the word Mahu is pronounced by both Christians and non-Christians as an interjection or exclamation in matters related to the day-to-day life. For instance, '*Mahu ni fon min*', means, 'may God wake us up.' '*Mahu na blo*', means, God will help us; etc...

<sup>60</sup> Theilhard de Chardin, quoted by Maurice, A. G., '*Le Vodun au Benin*,' in *Africana*, (No.1 Jan. – Feb. 1993), p.5

● **Legba** is perceived as the personification of the spirits of the earth. Legba is made of clay and placed in front of each household. He is the guard of the house, the human beings, animals and all that exist in a particular house. He is the interpreter of the will of the gods and the first to be honoured in ceremonies. Legba is also the voodoo god of destiny. He is found in front of most voodoo sanctuaries, at the crossroads and in front of houses, in form of an old man made of clay or wood.

● **Gou or Ogoun:** is considered to be the protector of the blacksmith and all those who use any metallic instruments in their manual work. He is the protective god of war and also the guardian and protector of all the travellers. *“He keeps all his followers from sudden death, such as accident.”*<sup>61</sup>

● **Hoho (Twins)** [see picture 6]: In voodoo tradition, twins, who are alive or dead, are venerated as voodoo gods. Living twins are approached with respect in the community. The dead twins are automatically venerated as voodoo gods. People believe that twins have magico religious power to do good or bad. In some African societies, twins are considered as a great danger. Therefore they are even put to death together with their mother, since their mysterious birth is considered to be ominous.

In general, the voodoo gods can be chosen by a clan to be venerated according to the geographic context or the profession of the majority of its members. There are many other divinities in the Voodoo pantheon and they constitute part of the hundreds of voodoo gods venerated in Benin and most West African countries.

The marvellous aspect in Voodoo religion, which raises curiosity and attraction, is the spirit possession (see pictures 8 & 9). In fact, the voodoo gods are believed to communicate with their followers by possessing them and using them as messengers. A dozing, which may be very short can precede the possession (picture 10). *“In this state, the possessed cannot keep his eyes open and may seem overcome by a vague languor.”*<sup>62</sup> The state of ecstasy can last many hours and even a whole day. This can be referred to as the state of compensation in the sense that a mere follower possessed by a spirit can be a centre of attraction and, therefore, may deserve much respect due to the spirit, which possesses him. The Voodooists also

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Daa Lekotan, Anagonou (3<sup>rd</sup>), (Toffo, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1999), [see Appendix no. 4]

<sup>62</sup> Alfred, Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), p.121.

believe that there is a similarity between the spirit or voodoo god and the adept possessed. The spirit uses the believers as instruments or means to communicate to the rest of the believers.

## 2.5. INITIATION INTO VODOO RELIGION

Voodoo is a religion belonging to a particular ethnic group. Therefore, the condition for being a member of a given voodoo sanctuary is that, one is born in the tribe or ethnic group or family, which worships a particular voodoo god. Nevertheless, belonging to any voodoo is a vocation, a call from the spirit mostly during the childhood of the particular follower. The initiation process into the Voodoo religion is very long and can last many years. *"The period of initiation can last three years, It is the period during which the novices receive adequate instruction that transforms them anew. It is somehow a period of death and resurrection. Died in their old persons, the novices are created anew through the period of initiation. They are taught new language, the language of the voodoo god. New names are given to them. All these instructions will be given by a well prepared voodoo priest and pedagogue."*<sup>63</sup>

The initiation consists of some sacrifices from the beginning to the end of the period of initiation. A week before the period of initiation starts, all the candidates are gathered in the sanctuary for a special preparation. Each novice takes with himself all the objects required and white clothes. This first period consists of doing many activities such as, charity and acts of piety. It is a moment of repentance that enables the novices to reconcile themselves with the community so that they may enter into the religious formation with clean and pure hearts and accompanied by the necessary blessings of the members of their community.

The whole process starts in the sanctuary with libations (*pictures 7 & 8*), sacrifices and processions of offerings. The priest put on the head of each novice a heavy stone. Then with their hands the novices are supposed to hold the stone and start dancing in front of the god. The heavy burden they carry is to remind them that they have to live in solidarity and carry the burdens of each other and always be obedient to the elders. One by one the novices leave the sanctuary with song and dance, greeting all the members,

---

<sup>63</sup> Christiane, Roussé-G., *Mission Catholique et Choc des Modèles Culturels en Afrique : L'Exemple du Dahomey (1861 – 1928)*, [Paris: Editions L'Hamattan, 1985], p.63.

parents and friends who come to see them off. From the sanctuary they are led slowly to the seclusion for the period of initiation where they will come out only after some years. Because of that many parents cry unceasingly when their children are taken for initiation. Not all the candidates who start the initiation come back alive, because, there are always some cases of death.

The end of the initiation occurs most of the time on Sunday morning. Some hours before the 'baptism' of the neophytes, they will bath after staying many years without bathing, and wear the best white vestments. In the afternoon of the initiation, the priest instructor leads the novices from seclusion to the assembly where their parents and godparents are waiting to welcome them. Celebrations, dances and feasts take place for many days. This long duration of initiation imposes a heavy economic burden for the followers of voodoo.

## **2.6. VOODOO AND THE CONVENTIONAL DESCRIPTION OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

There are some adjectives that many scholars have used in describing ATR including the practices of Voodoo religion. In conventional descriptions, the terms primitive, paganism, Idolatry, Fetishism and Animism have been used pejoratively to refer to ATR and other African cultural practices.

### **2.6.1 Primitive**

The Oxford concise English Dictionary defines the term primitive as "*Early, Ancient, Old fashioned, simple, rude, original, primary and so on.*" It is obvious that in the light of some of the words in this definition, the term '*primitive*' cannot be appropriate in certain contexts in which it has been applied by many scholars with regard to ATR. Furthermore, with reference to any people in our modern world, early, ancient, original or primary does not apply. Primitive human beings in the sense conveyed by the connotation of the term '*primitive*' disappeared from this world thousands of years ago. Nevertheless, western writers still persist in applying the term to Africa and to African beliefs and practices. Every religion practised by living people is usually affected by the inevitable factor of change, which is a universal phenomenon. Thus, it is really not objective to speak of the religion of any living people as '*primitive*', due to ethnocentrism. It is not only inappropriate, but also offensive to describe Voodoo religion and any ATR exclusively as primitive.

---

### 2.6.2. Paganism

This term '*Paganism*' is probably the oldest of the names adopted to describe the religion of the so-called primitive or uncivilised peoples of the world. The word, 'paganism' itself originated from the Latin word 'paganus', which means a village dweller or a countryman, a person, who lives away from the civilised urban community. It was thus a sociological term, distinguishing the enlightened, the civilised and the sophisticated on the one hand, from the rustic, the unpolished and unsophisticated. The term paganism, therefore, according to its roots was never meant to be a word used with a religious connotation, except it is used to refer to the habits, characteristics or all the cultural practices of the country-dwellers in any part of the world.

The word paganism might have found a place into the religious context by way of derogatory ethnocentric comparisons made by those who believed that their own religions were superior or more meaningful than other religions, which they described as paganism. '*Paganism*' is, therefore, a derogatory imposition and an opprobrious term. Although there are still some elements of magic and superstitions in ATR, there is no honest way of using paganism as the name for describing them.

### 2.6.3. Idolatry

The term '*idolatry*' is from the Greek 'eidolon', which means "a shape, image or phantom, an image in the mind, idea or spectre, a vision fancy developed into a portrait, especially of a god and later on false god."<sup>64</sup> From this definition, 'eidolon' seems to have been tossed about between the representation or shadow of what is fully real and what is not real or which if real at all, is real only as a creation of the human mind. However, is the word 'idolatry' appropriate in describing a whole religion? We cannot say that religion is necessarily 'idolatry' simply because it uses material representations of the cult-objects. The fact about the use of material emblems is that, to Africans, the material has no meaning apart from the symbolic and spiritual. It is the spiritual that informs the material and gives it whatever quality and meaning it has. Thus, to call Voodoo religion or any other ATR, '*idolatry*' is to be grossly unfair to it and to ignore its complexity and essence.

---

<sup>64</sup> Bolaji, Idowu, *African traditional religion, A definition*. (London : SMC Press, 1973), p.121

#### 2.6.4. Fetishism

According to Ahanhanzo, the term '**Fetishism**' is "derived from the Portuguese word '*fético*', which means something artificial, fictitious and at the same time a source of happiness."<sup>65</sup> '**Fetishism**' was introduced as a general descriptive term for the African '*worship*' of material and terrestrial objects. There was in fact a tendency of considering Africa as the land governed by fetish. It is beyond doubt that no African worships material objects but, they worship God, the gods or spirits incarnated and symbolised in the material objects. This is the same case with the Voodoo gods, worshiped by most Beninese people. "No Voodooist, worships in whatsoever way the material thing symbolised by the thunder, the snake, the tree, the statues etc...But they worship the Spirits and gods incarnated in them."<sup>66</sup> In case of blasphemy or any sacrilege in voodoo religion, the spirits may leave the material objects used as their receptacles. In Southern Benin, for instance, when a head of a family or a voodoo priest dies, his voodoo gods are perceived to die with him, unless one of his descendants inherits them before his death. People normally say in such case: "**Xwé o hun**", that is, the house door is open or broken. In such a case, there is a need for the restoration of the voodoo god through some specific rituals. Most of the time, there can be a ritual of "**Xwé cloclo**", that is, the purification or cleansing of the house.

Therefore, 'fetishism' as a general description for the traditional religions in Africa may have resulted from a misuse or abuse of the word and it is therefore, inappropriate in the description of Voodoo religion.

#### 2.6.5 Animism

Tylor defines '**animism**' as "the doctrine of souls and other spiritual beings in general."<sup>67</sup> He does not confine '**animism**' to any particular race or culture, but he states that '**animism**' is an attendant factor in every culture at any level of development.

The nature of Christianity as any other religion is grounded on the fact that God is spirit. Animism can, therefore, be understood as being part of every religion. However we concur with Alfred that, "a number of rather vague animist beliefs are to be found floating, so to speak in the margin of Voodoo religion. They

<sup>65</sup> Maurice, Ahanhanzo, -G., 'Le Vodun au Benin', in, *Africana*, No.1, (Jan. – Feb.1993), p.5

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6

seem adapted to small and very primitive ethnic groups and do not fit into the main pattern of the Voodoo religious system.<sup>68</sup> For instance, the idea of a soul existing in any object that moves or has life, seems an over simplified and too convenient explanation of the interplay of supernatural forces. Therefore, it is somewhat inappropriate to describe or name Voodoo Religion or any other ATR as '*animism*', as it is similarly derogatory and an abusive nomenclature of African religious beliefs.

Talbot, while defining the religion of Southern Nigeria stated wisely that, "*On the whole, the region of the Southern Nigeria, resembles that of the ancient Egypt, which combined a belief in the existence of an omnipotent and omniscient supreme God, with that in multitude of subordinate deities.*"<sup>69</sup> Talbot's view can with no doubt apply to Voodoo religion and any ATR as well. In fact, there is no part of Africa where the ultimate power is not accorded to God. Similarly, over many generations, people have worshipped God without being so much preoccupied with finding names for their religions. As Idowu Bolaji stated, "*it is in fact the outsider, the observer, the investigator, the curious, the detractor or the busy body who first supplied labels to others' religions.*"<sup>70</sup>

Religion literary means "*service or worship of God.*" This denotation embraces the inward and outward aspects of any religion, be it Voodoo or any other ATR. African religion(s) should be viewed as variants of the main human religious experience, which should be incorporated in the process of unification through inculturation of the gospel.

Through the description of Voodoo religion and its organisation, it is evident that Voodoo religion is really an African Indigenous religion. Okanla states that, "*Voodoo religion is not black magic, juju, witchcraft or sorcery. It is in fact, a complex religion, practised worldwide by 40 million people. It has an organised system of beliefs based upon an oral history spanning hundreds of years, and a loosely organised priesthood.*"<sup>71</sup> The belief in God as the creator and sustainer of everything is beyond doubt present in the heart of Voodoo religion. However, God is perceived to be a being so remote with no direct contact with the

<sup>67</sup> Edward Tylor quoted by Bolaji, I., *Op. cit.* p.128.

<sup>68</sup> Alfred, Metraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, (New York. Schocken Books Inc., 1972), p.129.

<sup>69</sup> Bolaji, Idowu, *Op. cit.* p.135.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* p.135

<sup>71</sup> Karim Okanla, *Benin: Voodoo Nation*, in, *BBC Focus on Africa*, April- June 1996, p.45.

human beings. Thus, there is a need for intermediaries and secondary divinities, which are called voodoo gods. These gods are the gods of nature and all the phenomena that are beyond the local people's understanding. A group of followers may choose voluntarily to adhere to a given voodoo sanctuary. This may either be through a direct calling as in the case of the descendants of the ethnic group who own a voodoo god, or through personal adhesion. The aim of a congregation of initiated members is to gather for celebrations, sacrifices and all rituals in honour of their voodoo god, in order to seek favour and happiness.

One needs to grasp the meaning of Voodoo religion for an effective missionary work in Southern Benin and other areas where its influence is felt. The first missionaries failed to achieve a clear understanding of Voodoo religion. Instead of bringing the good news of Jesus Christ in the context of the existing cultures, the pioneer missionaries created a situation of tension, hatred and hostility. Nonetheless, we have to congratulate the first missionaries for their endeavour and endurance. Despite all the obstacles that they met, they succeeded in proclaiming the gospel to the nations, although at times, their message remained at the superficial level.

## CHAPTER THREE

# VOODOO RELIGION AND CHRISTIANITY

### 3.0. INTRODUCTION

After many centuries of Evangelisation in Africa and in Benin in particular, it seems as if the work of evangelisation is still at its very beginning. Despite the progress and success of missionary activities, many Africans have not yet internalised the gospel message. We have to acknowledge that evangelisation in Africa has been affected by the lack of adequate dialogue and interaction between Christianity and ATR. It is deplorable to notice that after more than a hundred years of evangelisation, the people of Southern Benin, not only still remain faithful to their traditional beliefs, but also have developed an attitude of resistance and suspicion towards Christianity. At the same time, they have reached a deep level of syncretism, which is a great challenge for the local Church of Southern Benin. Who is to blame? The first missionaries or the indigenous people who have been evangelised?

In this chapter, we present an overview of the Christians' attitude toward voodoo religion. We also evaluate the motivations leading people from Voodoo religion to Christianity and the phenomenon of syncretism within voodoo religion especially due to the resentment attitude of Voodoo adherents. Lastly, we examine the influence of voodoo religion on the society and mainly on the Christian missions in Benin.

### 3.1. THE ATTITUDE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TOWARD VOODOO RELIGION

Before starting their missionary work in Benin in 1861, the SMA<sup>72</sup> Fathers visited the King of Abomey in order to have permission for access to the country deeply rooted at that time in Voodoo beliefs. *"It was father Borghero, superior of the Vicariate of Dahomey who led the visit to the King. His visit was very positive and he was given permission to start a mission on the coast town of Ouidah."*<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> SMA stands for the Society of African Mission.

<sup>73</sup> Josué-Marie, G., Le Mouvement Missionnaire au X<sup>ème</sup> Siècle et l'Évangélisation du Dahomey (Benin), (St. Léger Vauban: Pierre Qui Vire Press, 1994), p.56

This seemed to be a good start, but unfortunately, soon after father Borghero's visit to the King, there were strong reactions from the traditionalists who thought that the king had accepted the 'religion of the white man', as they used to call Christianity. From that time up to date the hostility and resentful attitude against Christianity has proven to be persistent in Southern Benin. In one way or another, the Church has been responsible for the permanent hostility between Christianity and Voodoo, because of the method of Evangelisation used by the first missionaries. For many years, and even up to date, the instructions given in catechumenate by the Catholic Church gives a clear picture of the Church's position toward voodoo religion which is considered as being full of superstitions and an inferior type of religion. This has prevented the missionaries from being open to grasp the values that voodoo religion contains and how they affect the local adherents.

The official statements used in catechisms and mainly in the celebration of sacraments in Benin as well as in Haiti today take the following pattern:

- ◆ **Question (Q.):** *Who is the principal slave of Satan?*  
**Response (R.):** *The principal slave of Satan is the Houngan.*
- ◆ **Q.:** *What are the names given by Houngan to Satan?*  
**R.:** *The Houngan cali Satan, Voodoo god, ancestor, angel, and spirit.*
- ◆ **Q.:** *Why do the Houngan give to Satan the names of angel, Voodoo god, ancestor and spirit?*  
**R.:** *The Houngan cali Satan by the names Voodoo god, angel, ancestor and spirit in order to deceive us more easily.*
- ◆ **Q.:** *How do people serve Satan?*  
**R.:** *People serve Satan by worshipping Voodoo, by sinning, by offering sacrifices to the gods and the spirits.*
- ◆ **Q.:** *Are we allowed to mingle with the slaves of Satan?*  
**R.:** *No, because they are the evildoers and like Satan himself, they are liars.<sup>74</sup>*

<sup>74</sup> Alfred, Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1972), p.336.

A more precise and contemptuous definition of Voodoo has been copied into a manuscript of catechism as follows: "A voodoo is a bad Angel, who rebelled against the good God, and was punished for that and was sent to hell."<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, for many years, the procedure for the Creed used during the celebration of any sacrament and especially in the rite of baptism, reveals clearly the negative attitude of the Catholic Church towards voodoo and its followers. Here are some elements of the Creed for the celebrations:

- ◆ Q.: "Do you renounce Satar: and all his followers? R.: I do.
- ◆ Q.: Do you renounce Voodoo and all its beliefs? R.: I do.
- ◆ Q.: Do you renounce Houngan and all his activities? R.: I do.
- ◆ Q.: Do you believe in one God Creator of Heaven and Earth? R.: I believe.
- ◆ Q.: Do you believe in Jesus his only Son, who suffered death, is risen, is ascended into Heaven and is seated at the right of the Father? R.: I believe."<sup>76</sup>

This kind of instruction promoted by the first missionaries prevented them from recognising the values and authenticity of the Voodoo culture. They looked upon them and the religious systems that they met as the work of the devil and Satan, a demonic manifestation against which they must fight. This position has not given room in any way for dialogue between the Church and the traditional religion. It has rather provoked hatred, hostility and has also given room for syncretism within Voodoo religion. The Church has, therefore, been contemptuous of Voodoo religion. But the converse is the case of some Voodoo adherents, who perceive it to be normal to combine Christian faith and voodoo beliefs. They have even borrowed from the Catholic Church many practices, such as, the use of the holy water and baptism, which is considered as a consecration rite. In the same way, voodoo priests consider the catholic communion as a sacrament, which increases their power. Sometimes, Voodoo priests they recommend to their clients the Holy Communion in case of sickness or as protection against all types of danger.

### 3.2. VOODOO RELIGION AND PROTESTANTISM

Another formidable enemy of voodoo is Protestantism. In fact, in the course of gaining many converts, the protestant Churches have shown themselves inimical to the religious choice of voodoo followers by

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p.337.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*,

harrying them with relentless hatred. Unlike the Catholic Church, the protestant Churches refuse all forms of compromise with voodoo religion. In the various protestant sects, in the Republic of Benin, therefore, believers of voodoo religion have found even worse formidable and tenacious adversaries than in Roman Catholicism. For the different protestant Churches found in Benin, such as, the Baptists, Methodists, Pentecost, Christian Celestial Church, Deeper Life Ministry, Gospel Faith Mission, Winners' Chapel, traditional religion of whatever kind is equated to Satanism and must be treated with total intransigence. Nevertheless, while many catholic converts practise voodoo cults more or less openly, Protestants break not only with the voodoo cult itself, but also with all that might in any way make them recall it.

With no doubt, it is the challenging attitude adopted by the Protestants toward voodoo religion that has convinced many voodoo adherents to embrace Christianity in Benin. There is an economic aspect too, which leads Voodooists to abjure their traditional religion. The austere life of many Protestant families has resulted in a certain prosperity, which many like to regard as no more than the reward of a just providence. Most of the times, *"Protestants who are ex-Voodooist are regarded as the sworn foes of their previous religion. Their intransigence towards it takes at times the form of obsessive scruples. But we may as well wonder whither the rigidity and intolerance of their attitude may not spring at the heart from fear of backsliding"*<sup>77</sup>. What are therefore, the other motivations that lead people to flee from Voodoo Religion to Christianity in general?

### **3. 3. CONVERSION FROM VOODOO TO CHRISTIANITY**

The burden that voodoo religion has had on its adherents, has made many people flee the religion. There are however, many other reasons behind the conversion of many voodoo adherents to Christianity. Illness is most significant the motivation behind most cases of conversion. Sometimes, it is the Voodoo priest himself who realises the ineffectiveness of the cure he prescribes and advises the patient or even his entire family to simultaneously resort to the voodoo god and the assistance from Protestantism. When the Christian remedies and therapies prove efficacious the voodoo adherents gradually convert to Christianity.

---

<sup>77</sup> Alfred, Metraux, *Op. cit.*, p.354.

Conversion can also be a consequence of revolt against a voodoo god who may have let its adherents down.

In general, conversion from voodoo religion to Christianity is more noticeable in the Protestant Churches than in the Catholic Church. Many Voodooists have become protestants not because voodoo religion failed to supply their need for a purer, loftier religion, but on the contrary, because they felt themselves to be the target of angry voodoo gods and saw in Protestantism a refuge. *"Hence, Protestantism beckons as a though it were a shelter, or more precisely a magic circle where people cannot be got at by voodoo gods, nor by demons."*<sup>78</sup>

There is also an economic factor behind many conversions from voodoo religion to Christianity and mainly to Protestantism. In fact, *"the Protestant Sects in particular the Baptist and the Christian Celestial Church make less financial demands on their members than do Catholicism and Voodoo religion."*<sup>79</sup> A protestant convert shared with us the story of his conversion. He became a member of the Christian Celestial Church, because he could no longer meet the economic or financial demands of the voodoo god '*Gou*', which he was serving. He told us that, *"now, we have no ceremonies to pay for. If any one of us falls sick, the whole community bears the expenses. So I have practically no worry about the future."*<sup>80</sup>

Certain Protestant sects in Southern Benin, such as the Christian Celestial Church and Gospel faith Mission, usually cultivate religious enthusiasm to the point of mystical trance and exert a strong pull on many Voodooists who for one reason or another wish to become protestants. Sometimes too, those who become converts so as to find shelter from the Voodoo gods are disappointed to discover that their new religion does not shield them completely from misfortune. They at times regret their decision and try at first secretly and then openly to re-integrate themselves with the Voodoo gods. However the somewhat strong negative attitude of the Churches, especially, the Protestants towards Voodoo religion, has facilitated the development of the phenomenon of syncretism within this religion.

---

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 357.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Mr. Avoce, Emile, 26years old and an ex-adherent of the voodoo '*Gou*', (Cotonou : 15<sup>th</sup> July 1999)

### 3.4. SYNCRETISM WITHIN VOODOO RELIGION

For some voodoo adherents, it is normal to combine both Christian faith and Voodoo beliefs. They have indeed borrowed from Christianity many practices, for instance *it is customary for most services and celebrations to voodoo gods to be preceded by thanksgiving, penitential rites and Ave Marias (Hail Mary). These can at times be followed by hymns to the Virgin Mary and to the Saints. The singing, prayers and kneeling which precede services are said to stir the voodoo gods up.*<sup>81</sup> In the same way, the use of holy water with which voodoo adherents are sprinkled from a leafy branch has also been appropriated into Voodoo celebrations and rituals. The profanation of the holy Communion is one of the most serious charges, which the Catholic Church has had against Voodoo adherents.

It is noticeable nowadays that, most of the Christian feasts are celebrated by the traditionalists, more than the true Christians. For example in Benin, the yearly national pilgrimage organised by the Church is attended by the Voodooist in great numbers. This also applies to many other Christian feasts and celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter. This phenomenon of syncretism is much alive also in the countries where voodoo religion has a great influence. In Haiti for example, *“ throughout Lenten season, voodoo sanctuaries are shut and no service is celebrated in them. Sometimes even in Holy Week, cult accessories, such as pitchers containing spirits voodoo god stones and emblems are covered over with a sheet as are the images in Catholic Churches. Christmas night is also the moment when voodoo ritual takes wing as it were in its full plumage.”*<sup>82</sup> This shows the great interest, which many voodoo adherents have had for Christianity, so as to make use of some of the ritual elements, which are perceived to have positive consequences for their well being.

On the contrary, the Catholic Church shows no interest to Voodoo religion. The campaign of the Roman Catholic Church against voodoo, which is considered as full of superstitions, has been wide spread. The clergy has even denounced the syncretism within voodoo religion as an abomination. However, no systematic action has been taken to counteract religious syncretism in Southern Benin. At times, Voodoo adherents bring to the catholic priests, holy objects and pictures to be blessed. Unfortunately the clergy

---

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323

<sup>82</sup> Alfred, Metraux, *Voodoo in Haiti* (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1972), 329.

seem to have no inkling that the holy pictures and objects, which they are required to bless, are to be used in Voodoo sanctuaries (see *Picture 2*). Furthermore, Baptism has been adopted in Voodoo religion as part of the traditional consecration rites. In Voodoo sanctuaries, both the people and the Voodoo gods as well as cult objects are baptised. The ceremony is celebrated with a degree of solemnity, which can vary according to whether the item to be baptised is a sanctuary, drums, necklaces, clothing or any other ordinary object.

In order to obtain forgiveness from an angry and offended voodoo god, the voodoo adherents practise various forms of external catholic penitence. Some devotees, on orders from a voodoo priest, do an act of charity, to obtain the favours from the voodoo god. Quite often people talk of the Southern Beninese Catholics as being Christians during the day and Voodoo practitioners at night. This growing phenomenon of syncretism has become a great challenge for Christianity and needs to be taken seriously and approached methodically.

### **3. 5. VOODOO RELIGION AND THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONS**

From the very beginning of the evangelisation process in the Southern Benin, there has been a growing hostility between Christianity and Voodoo adherents. For instance, *“the voodoo priest succeeded in convincing the people that the missionaries were the cause of the long drought that fell on the country in 1870. So in the face of the threatening mob, the fathers had to withdraw to Porto-Novo in 1871. The Ouidah mission remained deserted for 13 years, while Porto-Novo slowly developed into a new mission centre.”*<sup>83</sup> The situation remained the same until 1893 when France conquered Dahomey. It was then that the Evangelisation started anew throughout the country. In the meantime, voodoo, the traditional religion remained intact in the countryside, while Christianity developed in the towns.

The great apostle of Dahomey to serve the country for sixty years, from 1892 to 1952, was the first Bishop, Francis Steinmez. During his episcopate (1901-1930), the foundations of the Church in Benin were laid, priestly training began in Ouidah and as early as 1928, the first priest was ordained. The vocations to

---

<sup>83</sup> John Baur. *Two thousand Years of Christianity in Africa* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1998), p. 145.

sisterhood went parallel to those for priesthood, but they were not numerous. At the same time, the training of the voodoo priests went on. This strong background of traditional religion gave to the Catholic Church in Benin its specific character.

Meanwhile, the Protestants were also involved in the Evangelisation of Benin (see Map no.5). *“In 1870, a British pastor, Joseph Rhodes came to Porto-Novo and immediately started the study of the local language as a foundation for his missionary activities. And already in 1888 the first protestant temple was built.”*<sup>84</sup> The missionaries had to face from the very beginning two great challenges; the slave trade and the menaces of Voodoo religion. The Protestants' campaign was without any compromise with the traditional religion. This led to an open conflict between Christianity and voodoo religion, which up to date has negatively affected the relationship between the adherents of Voodoo religion and Protestantism.

Unlike the Protestants, the Catholics understood that the only way to penetrate the local religion was through dialogue and the study of the existing culture. However, their actions related to inculturation remained at a rather superficial level. Nevertheless *“father Père Aupiais, the provincial superior of the SMA fathers (1937-1945), was the first missionary to try to give to the rich African traditions of Benin their right place in a modern society. He insisted that the African priests as well as all those involved in missionary activities in Africa should study the existing cultures of the people.”*<sup>85</sup> What can be noticed nowadays in Southern Benin is the fact that, Voodoo religion still has a challenging influence on Christianity, particularly on the Christians themselves. Those who are most affected, are the ex-adherents of Voodoo converted to Christianity. Voodoo religion leads its adherents to the belief in a fixed destiny, which is a kind of belief in predestination and fatalism. This has been a burden and toll on the personal freedom of each individual. Therefore, an ex-Voodooist converted to Christianity live for quite along time in the dilemma or rather in a conflictual situation between the old voodoo beliefs and the newly embraced Christian faith. That is why many Christians, especially the Catholics continue consulting their 'Fâ'<sup>86</sup>. The main reason why people consult the 'Fâ', is *“the fact that people run away from their responsibility and try by all means to put the*

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p.274.

<sup>86</sup> The Consultation of the 'Fâ' is the divination in order to know one's destiny or one's fate in every life situations.

blame of any mistake on their fellow humans or on the divine.<sup>87</sup> In this sense, to help the newly converts from voodoo to Christianity, there is a need of an instruction based upon the evangelic freedom and personal responsibility.

Another dimension in which voodoo religion influences many Christians is the desire, which it develops in the heart of its adherents. People often look for happiness at all costs, either by seeking protection from the voodoo gods, or by any other means. Even for the Christian Catholic ex-voodooists, God is still perceived to be remote and far from us. Thus they consider the need to keep a good relationship with the voodoo gods and the ancestors between them and God. Many people still live in a great dilemma after conversion from Voodoo to Christianity. This phenomenon has been much alive among the fervent Christians, especially the Catholics, who are caught up in a situation of cognitive dissonance.

Voodoo Religion, therefore, remains a great challenge for the Christian missions in Benin. The ever-growing tension between Christianity and Voodoo religion in Benin has somewhat been provoked by the negative attitude of the Christians towards voodoo adherents. Another challenging aspect of Voodoo to Christianity has been the phenomenon of syncretism, which is gradually taking root among voodoo adherents and in the hearts of many Christians as well. This has led Voodoo religion to take advantage of some of the values of Christianity such as the coming together of adepts for cults, sacrifices and celebrations. Furthermore, the faith of the Voodoo adherents is as deep as ever and its rituals and mythology are in constant growth. What should therefore be done so as to face this challenge that Voodoo poses to Christianity in the Republic of Benin? We have to dedicate ourselves to the study and understanding of voodoo religion in order to reach a level of appreciation of the richness, its values and system of beliefs. The fact is that voodoo religion has embraced all the aspects of the life of the people in Southern Benin. There is a need for purifying some of the negative aspects, which are still part and parcel of the Voodoo system of beliefs, for effective evangelisation in Benin.

---

<sup>87</sup> Michel Dujarier, 'De la Religion Traditionnelle au Christianisme', in. *La Voix du Togo-Ghana-Benin*, (Comboni Bulletin), [Juillet 1997], p.23.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 4.0 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we give a summary and conclusion of the essay. First and foremost, we give an assessment of the status of voodoo religion with regard to the question as to whether it is a myth or a reality. This is done from a brief review of certain works done on Voodoo and the opinions of some authors on the topic. Drawing from some voodoo values, an attempt is made to provide a framework of helping the people of southern Benin to shift from the belief in the voodoo gods to the revealed God. Finally some recommendations are made in order to strengthen the inculturation process in Southern Benin. This presentation aims at suggesting a new missionary methodology of evangelisation in Southern Benin.

#### 4.1. VOODOO PHENOMENON: A MYTH OR A REALITY?

Many missionaries have dismissed the idea that voodoo religion exists and term it as a mere human invention, which keeps the people under fear. Among the Fon, there is a popular phrase that states "*Me we non do ninyi vodun b'e non nyi vodun*", which means that, it is the person who names it Voodoo god before it becomes. This expression can make one think that Voodoo religion is just a mere human creation. This has been what many western scholars and unfortunately, some missionaries think and argue while talking about Voodoo religion.

Surely there must be something true about voodoo religion, and we have no doubt about it. It was due to such a strong conviction that, Fr. Gilli Bruno, a Comboni missionary presently working in the Republic of Togo, put all his efforts to study voodoo religion in Southern Togo and Benin. Fr. Gilli concluded that, "*Voodoo is a reality, yet it is impossible to define it, even by its own adherents. Thus voodoo religion is a mystery, which can be known only through its manifestations.*"<sup>88</sup> From Fr. Gilli's conclusion, we can affirm beyond doubt that voodoo is a reality incarnating the divinity and the sacred. Voodoo religion is in fact, a

---

<sup>88</sup> Bruno. Gilli, *Naissances humaines ou divines? : Analyse de certains types de naissances attribués au Vodun*, (Doctoral Dissertation, Paris, 1982; Lomé: Editions Haho, 1982.)

presence of the divine in the life and midst of the people through the divinities or voodoo gods. This presence inspires confidence and reassures all Voodoo adherents of their future and life expectations.

Earlier on, Metraux<sup>89</sup> attempted to study Voodoo religion in Haiti from his personal encounters with many adherents and voodoo priests in the Haitian Island. He found out that the poverty-stricken peasants of Haiti expressed their miseries through their faith and hopes in Voodoo religion. He concluded that voodoo is, in fact, a religion that has embraced all the aspects of the life of many people in Haiti. Metraux observed that Voodoo religion has borrowed many practices from Christianity so as to remain ever alive. This has been a great challenge and threat to Christianity, which promoted an anti-superstition campaign against Voodoo as a way of winning followers. However, due to its strong organisation Voodoo religion has survived all efforts directed against it and has strengthened itself and remained alive in the minds and lives of the people.

In the same line, Fr. Adoukonou<sup>90</sup> did a hermeneutic of the Voodoo religion in Dahomey. He states that, in the modern Africa touched by the western culture, it is in fact worthy for us Africans and Beninians in particular to study voodoo religion in order to grasp its meaning and religious values. This will enable us to be more open in order to receive the gospel message of Jesus Christ. Indeed, *"it is only when we know our own values and what we believe in that we can be sure enough to open ourselves to others."*<sup>91</sup>

Voodoo religion is very rich in values and its main purpose, is to keep people in harmony with each other and with the other elements in the universe. Furthermore, respect for life, love for one another, respect for the common good, care for the community and desires for life and the divine, are the characteristic values of voodoo religion. According to Fr. Adoukonou, what makes the Beninese potentially religious is the religious background inherited from Voodoo religion. This religion has embraced all the aspects of the life of

---

<sup>89</sup> Alfred, Metraux, was one of the most distinguished ethnologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is the author of *Le Vaudou Haitien*, (Voodoo in Haiti, translated by Hugo Charteris), Atelier S.E.P.C : Saint Armand ( France ), 1977

<sup>90</sup> Fr. Adoukonou Barthelémy is a Beninese Catholic priest. Presently, he is the rector of the National Spiritual Year Seminary and a professor of theology in the National Major Seminary of Benin. He is the author of various books, including, *Jalons pour Une Théologie Africaine : Essai d'une Herméneutique Chrétienne du Vodun Dahoméen*, Paris, Lethielleux, 1979

<sup>91</sup> Michael Moloney, *Dialogue with Islam*, (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1997), p. 6.

the people of the republic of Benin to the extent that no one can deny its existence. "Voodoo is in fact, an instituted symbolism, which embraces 'nungbo' and 'xojoxo'<sup>92</sup>. Therefore, we can affirm with no doubt that the voodoo phenomenon is indeed a reality. However, we cannot deny the fact that it is based or founded on mythology. The origin of voodoo remains somewhat mysterious even for the qualified adherents and the priests as well."<sup>93</sup>

Although the scholars, who have studied voodoo religion have not brought a convincing explanation of the religion, the fact is that it exists and is ever alive in the people's hearts in Southern Benin as well as in many other West African and Latin American countries. It is unfortunate that some prejudiced and ethnocentric missionaries have ignored and even totally denied the existence of voodoo to the point of not recognising its positive values. Michel Dujarier, a great missionary who worked for many years in Benin, but who failed to grasp the meaning of the traditional Voodoo religion made surprising observations about this religion. At the end of his term in Benin, he stated that "the notion of Divinity that the traditionalists have is built upon a great fear of the spirits, the ancestors and nature. He insisted that even Jesus Christ himself may one day be mistaken for a Voodoo god, due to the success and power of the Catholic Church."<sup>94</sup> In view of this statement, it is apparent that, Dujarier's missionary activities were done at a rather superficial level. Even up to date, many missionaries, who are working in Benin, still think in the same way. They are not really able to recognise the local culture so as to appreciate the richness and values carried in the voodoo religion. Unless the missionaries change their stance about Voodoo religion, they are most unlikely to enter into the depth of the mysterious reality of voodoo religion for effective evangelisation.

Despite all the criticisms against voodoo religion and its dismissal as a religion at all, it still remains a reality in Benin. It will remain ever alive, unless our evangelisation methodology and approaches in the context of voodoo are changed. Furthermore, no one can deny that voodoo has a system of beliefs built upon the

<sup>92</sup> 'Nungbo' means a great or a very important thing. 'Xojoxo' means the creative word or the truth.

<sup>93</sup> Barthelemy, Adoukonou, *Op. cit.*, p.232.

<sup>94</sup> Michel, Dujarier, 'De la Religion Traditionnelle au Christianisme', in, *La Voix du Togo-Ghana-Benin*, (Comboni Bulletin) [Juillet 1997], p.24

belief in the existence of a Supreme Being called '*Mahu*' and the existence of the divinities or voodoo gods, who serve as intermediaries between Mahu and the human beings.

#### **4. 2. . RELEVANCE OF VOODOO VALUES IN THE SOUTHERN BENIN CULTURAL CONTEXT**

*"People always wonder whether Voodoo is a moral or immoral religion"*<sup>95</sup>. Although voodoo is not a religious system with a well-defined body of doctrines, it is indeed built upon an oral tradition. The Voodoo gods are conceived in the image of human beings, and act in conformity with the moral laws, which govern the Beninese society. A Voodoo god in any way cannot approve crime, since Voodoo gods are friends of human beings and intercede for them to God.

The Voodoo gods in general maintain a harmony and cohesion between the members of a given community or a social group. At times this is materialised through the blood covenant "*Nun vodun*"<sup>96</sup>. This cohesion can also be between families and from one generation to another, "*based upon some taboos, respect, and good moral behaviour.*"<sup>97</sup> In fact, Voodoo religion through these regulations and norms is a source of morality and legislation. According to Voodoo morality, "*No one should ever kill. And generally all who dare and attempt any criminal acts in life end in misery and even confess publicly the names of all their victims.*"<sup>98</sup> Voodoo norms also state that, no one should neither commit adultery nor steal. It is enough to put at the entrance of a farm a Voodoo god statue to keep every body from entering into it.

Furthermore, Voodoo adherents believe that voodoo gods protect and punish. It is the voodoo gods who assure the security, prosperity, happiness and well being of their followers. Voodoo religion, therefore, is at the service of human beings. The useful and productive role of Voodoo in the domain of art deserves a great appreciation. In fact, in music and dances, Voodoo religion has allowed the Beninese people to maintain and develop their cultural and religious heritage. A well-conducted Voodoo ceremony is something worth seeing as the drummers and dancers are often virtuous in their crafts. Voodoo religion, therefore,

<sup>95</sup> Alfred, Metraux . *Op. cit.*, p.364

<sup>96</sup> '*Nun Vodun*', literally means, drink the voodoo god. It is a covenant relationship by which two individuals or more promise each other to live in solidarity and fidelity with each other for ever.

<sup>97</sup> Josué-Marie, G., *Op. cit.*, p.53

<sup>98</sup> Maurice A. G., *Op. Cit.*, p.8.

definitely gives originality to the traditional culture of Benin. Bishop Sartre stated that, *“the World as seen by the Southern Beninese is concerned with solidarity, unity and totality. What can express it with no doubt is snake biting its own tail”*<sup>99</sup>. All aspects in Benin Symbolism start and end with the sacred, the spiritual, which is the Voodoo religion.

### **4.3. VOODOO AND THE REVEALED GOD**

The fundamental motivations behind the beliefs in Voodoo religion are the desires to know, to live happily in a good relationship and harmony with fellow human beings and all the forces of nature. All these desires lead the voodoo adherents to *‘Mahu’* through the voodoo gods and the ancestors. How can we then help the voodoo adherents to understand and meet God through Jesus Christ, who is the way the truth and the life?

Surely, *“Jesus is the truth, and he responds to people’s desire to know God. He is the life, which fills all happiness and the way that leads us into good relationships with our fellow human beings, with nature and with all the forces of life.”*<sup>100</sup> We have seen throughout this essay that, Voodoo religion is indeed rich in an evangelic spirituality. We have come to understand that the people’s desire to know God, to live in harmony with each other and the world, are at the heart and the very roots of Voodoo religion. With this strong religious background, traditional Southern Beninese will have no major problems in understanding the Christian God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

However, it is only through respect and deep understanding of the cultural and religious values of the southern Beninese that, the gospel message can really touch the life and the heart of each individual. We have to acknowledge the existence of Voodoo religion as a reality and a challenge to the spread of the Good news of Jesus Christ in the republic of Benin, especially in the main Voodoo areas.

<sup>99</sup> Late Bishop Robert Sartre ( Bishop of the Diocese of Lokossa – Benin), quoted by Maurice, A., G., *Op.cit* , p.9

<sup>100</sup> Michel, Dujarier, *Op. cit.*, p 26

#### 4.4. CONCLUSION

This essay has presented a brief evaluation of Voodoo religion as regards its contacts with Christianity. An overview of the origin and organisation of Voodoo religion has helped us to understand more deeply the richness of this indigenous African religion. Voodoo religion and its entire heritage in the modern world is part of both the Beninese and the contemporary civilisation. The encounter between Voodoo religion and Western cultures brought through Christianity has resulted in awareness that Voodoo needs to be purified of its negative aspects such as strong belief in magic and witchcraft. Although, there is hardly any ethnic group in Africa without traditionalists, the groups that have remained faithful to ATR, have gradually become few. The best known case is that of the Fon with their elaborately organised Voodoo cult in Benin<sup>101</sup>. Voodoo religion has been deeply rooted in Benin and is supported by local priestly schools and hierarchies. The evangelisation of Southern Benin, which was subordinated to materialistic and political motivations and flawed by colonial domination and oppression, has for long been superficial. Despite the fact that the Church has engaged in the fight against Voodoo religion, such attacks have not touched the heart of any true Voodooist. Conversely, these actions have allowed the traditionalists to take advantage of the situation to develop a strong syncretism built upon the values of Christianity.

The southern Benin case calls for a fresh start and a new evangelisation approach built upon the concept of inculturation, which implies a continuous struggle with syncretism and with the elements of culture which are incompatible with the gospel<sup>102</sup>. The mistake that is being made by the missionaries in Benin today is that they still insist on fighting Voodoo religion and its syncretism by all means. In this case, for instance, the Protestant Churches have had no compromise with the local traditional religion. Despite all the anti-Voodoo campaigns, this traditional religion has taken root in the hearts of many local people of Southern Benin.

History has proved that *“syncretism is a necessary evil in the Church and that evangelisation is forced to tolerate syncretism up to a point. In fact, desyncretisation enters into the definition of inculturation itself”*<sup>103</sup>. In Benin, Voodoo, as a religious system has indeed become part and parcel of the lives of its adherents.

<sup>101</sup> John Baur, *Op. cit.*, p 507.

<sup>102</sup> Aylward Shorter, *Evangelisation and Culture*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), p.89

*"Without voodoo how could the people in the countryside get any assurance that their life will get better, that their own or their dear ones' illnesses can be healed? Have those who inveigh or are fighting Voodoo ever thought of the agony of a woman who when her child is sick, cannot reach a doctor? We can affirm that as long as there is no organised medical service in the countryside of Benin voodoo will go on"*<sup>104</sup>

In the same line no society, which is out to preserve its mental health can do without entertainment. From our observation, it was found that, the adherents find in Voodoo religion not only a communion with the supernatural but also an opportunity of therapeutic amusement through the religious rituals. *"The songs and dances in Voodoo celebrations are in themselves sacred. They also provide those who indulge in them an altogether profane pleasure. You have only to watch the leaping and twisting of the dancers in front of their partners to measure the intensity of the pleasure, which they desire therefrom. The social utility of Voodoo religion can be easily noticed. Ceremonies in honour of a voodoo god help to increase family solidarity since such ceremonies require the co-operation and unity of all members in the collective fulfilment of obligations to the voodoo gods."*<sup>105</sup>

The Church in Southern Benin can now take the advantage of the richness of the cultural and religious heritage of the local people so as to make the gospel message relevant to them. The missionaries should develop a sense of respect toward the local cultures. They have also to get rid of all prejudices and stop looking down upon Voodoo religion as a mere pagan institution. Inculturation in Benin would be more effective if the following advice of cardinal Arinze is followed: *"the Church respects the religious and cultures of all people on earth. In this line, she wishes to enter into contact with them so as to help them preserve the authentic noble values that they contain. Some of these values obviously are the sense of the sacred, respect for life, the sense of community, the fraternal and familial spirit, the spiritual vision and respect for authority are to be considered and promoted. (...) If the traditional religions can really be deeply understood by the missionaries and all the messengers of the Good news, Christianity can truly and efficaciously enter into the hearts of Africans."*<sup>106</sup>

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Alfred Metraux, *Op. Cit.*, p.363.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 364

<sup>106</sup> Arinze Cardinal B., quoted by, Justin Dossou-Yovo *Se et Vocation Chrétienne: Le Fon face à sa Destinée*, (Paris: Institut Catholique, 1996), p.95.

## 4.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This essay has provided a theological evaluation of Voodoo religion in relation to the evangelisation needs of Southern Benin. Some concrete and practical recommendations are provided here to help us undertake successful missionary activities in the Voodoo areas of the Republic of Benin.

In order to make the good news culturally acceptable and relevant in Southern Benin, we have to develop a sincere and true spirit of dialogue with Voodooists. *"We are called to promote a sincere religious dialogue not only between Voodoo religion and Christianity, but mainly between the Voodoo adherents and the Christians."*<sup>107</sup> The most important aspect of the dialogue between Christianity and voodoo religion is the encounter with the cultural and religious heritage that, Voodooism contains. However, there is a need to overcome the negative elements in voodoo religion, such as the underlying belief in magic. We have to know that *"Evangelisation is essentially a matter of dialogue. In the first place, it is a dialogue with human cultures, those patterns of human thought and behaviour which differentiate and identify groups of people."*<sup>108</sup>

Since, Voodoo religion has embraced all the aspects of the lives of the people of the Republic of Benin, we have to adopt a new methodology of evangelisation. This methodology should begin with thorough and effective pastoral instructions during the catechumenate. However, we have also to respect the personal freedom of choice of each and everyone. No one should indeed be forced in one way or another to embrace Christianity. *"The Church strictly forbids that anyone should not be forced to accept a faith or to be induced by unworthy devices. In the same way, no one should be frightened away from the faith by unjust persecutions."*<sup>109</sup> Therefore, we have to promote personal freedom of choice and at the same time give solid instructions to the newly converted. These instructions should be based on the life of faith and fraternal and personal relationship with Christ.

<sup>107</sup> Barthélémy, Adoukonou, *Op. cit.*, p.130.

<sup>108</sup> Aylward, Shorter, *Op.cit.*, p.79.

<sup>109</sup> Vatican II, Ad Gentes, No. 13, § 3.

Thirdly, we have to cultivate in each and every new Christian a sense of spiritual sacrifice and self-submission to God. We have in fact *"to serve God as slaves fearing their masters and as children offering themselves to the service of their father with love."*<sup>110</sup>

All the missionaries and pastoral agents working in Southern Benin have to get deeply in touch with the rich cultural and religious heritage of the local peoples for effective and successful missionary activities. This can be achieved through the study of the local languages so as to be able to understand where the people have reached in spiritual growth. How can one really know the people if he/she is unable to speak their language? We can serve the people in mission for years and even be ready to give away our lives for them without loving them. It is obvious that one of the striking signs of the lack of love for people is the inability to learn their language and to totally immerse oneself in their culture, in order to appreciate their deep seated cultural values. An immersion into local cultures and a thorough understanding of a people's whole way of life would make the contextualisation of the gospel more fruitful.

---

<sup>110</sup> Michel, Dujarier, *Op. cit.*, p.25.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Adoukonou, Barthélémy, **Jalons pour Une Théologie Africaine: Essay d'une Herméneutique Chrétienne du Vodun Dahoméen**, Paris: Editions Lethielleux, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_, **Le Vodun en débat: propositions pour un dialogue**, Cotonou: Publications Sillon Noir (No.8), 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_, **Une Expérience Africaine d'Inculturation**, Vol. II, Cotonou, Q.I.C, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_, **Le Sillon Noir s'exp ique**, Cotonou: Publications Sillon Noir (No.13), 1998
- Agbanon, Victor, **Le Culte du Vodun 'Dan'**, Cuidah: Grand Seminaire Saint Gall, 1974.
- Agossou, Jacob, **Gbeto et Gbedoto: L'Homme et le Dieu Createur selon les sud-Dahoméens**, Paris: Institut Catholique, 1971.
- Aguessi, Honorat, **Cultures Vodun, Manifestations, Migrations, Métamorphoses, (Afrique-Caraibes-Amériques)**, Cotonou: Institut de développement et d' Echanges, 1980.
- Baur John, **Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Africa** (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), Nairobi, Pauline Publications Africa, 1998.
- Cornevin, Robert, **La République Populaire du Bénin: Des Origines Dahoméennes à nos Jours**. Paris: Leenhardt et C<sup>e</sup>, 1981.
- Dossou-Yovo, Justin, **Sc et Vocation Chrétienne: Le Fon face à Sa Destinée**, Paris: Institut Catholique, 1996.
- Duteil, A., Sarazin, S., **Une Vie plus Forte que la Mort**, Paris: CIM, 1983.
- Gilli, Bruno, **Heviesso et le Bon Ordre du Monde: Approche d'une Religion Africaine**, Lomé: Editions Haho, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_, **Naissances humaines ou divines? : Analyse de certains types de naissances attribués au Vodun**, Lomé. Editions Haho, 1997.
- Goumadje, Josué-Marie (O.S.B), **Le Mouvement Missionnaire au XIX<sup>ème</sup> Siècle et l'Evangelisation du Dahomey**, Saint Léger – Vauban: Pierre Qui Vire Press. 1994.
- Idowu, E., Bolaji, **African Traditional Religion: A Definition** (1<sup>st</sup> Ed.), London: SCM Press. 1973.
- John Paul II, (Pope), **The Church in Africa**, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, ' *Ecclesia in Africa*', Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995.
- Mbiti John, **Introduction to African Religio n**, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_, **African Religions and Philosophy**, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1986

- Metraux, Alfred, **Le Vaudou Haitien**, Atelier S.E.P.C : Saint Armand ( France ), 1977
- \_\_\_\_\_, **Voodoo in Haiti** (translated by Hugo Charteris), New York: Schocken Books, 1981.
- Moloney, Michael, **Dialogue with Islam**, Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1997.
- Montilus, Guérin, **Les Religions Africaines comme source de Valeurs et de Civilisation**, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1972.
- Motte, Mary, & Lang, R., Joseph, **Mission in Dialogue**, New York: Orbis Books, 1982.
- Mugambi, JNK, **The Church and the Future of Africa: Problems and promises**, Nairobi: AACC, 1997.
- Pazzi, Roberto, **L'Homme Evé, Adja, Gen et For et son Univers**,(Dictionnaire), Lomé: Mission Catholique, 1976.
- Roussé-G., Christiane **Mission Catholique et Choc des Modèles Culturels en Afrique : L'Exemple du Dahomey (1861 – 1928)**, Paris: Editions L'Hamattan, 1985.
- Shorter, Aylward, **Evangelisation and Culture**, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_, **Christianity and African Imagination**, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995.
- Thomas, Louis, V., & Luneau, René, **Les Sages Dépossédés: Univers magique de l'Afrique du Nord**, Paris: Maury Imprimeur, 1977.

• **Sources**

- Catéchisme de L'Eglise Catholique**, Manchecout: Maury-Euriliveres, s.a, 1997
- Flannery, Austin, **Vatican Council II : The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents**, Bombay : St Pauls Press, 1975.
- Holy Bible, NRSV: Catholic Edition**, Washington: Catholic Bible Press, 1993.
- New Catholic Encyclopedia**, Vol. 14, Washington: The Catholic University of America, 1967.
- Segurola, Basile, **Dictionnaire Fon-Français**, Vol.2 (3rdEd.), Cotonou: Centre Catechetique, 1988,

• **Articles and Journals**

- Ahanzo-Glèlè, Maurice. 'Le Vodun au Bénin', in **Africana**, (No. 1), Jan. Feb. 1993, (pp.3-11).
- Dujarier. Michel, 'De la Religion Traditionnelle au Christianisme, ', in **La Voix du Togo-Ghana-Bénin**, (Comboni Bulletin), Juillet 1997, (pp. 22-27.)
- Okanla Karim, **Benin: Voodoo Nation**, in, **BBC Focus on Africa**, April- June 1996, pp.44-48.
- 'Voodoo in Benin', in, **The Courier**, (No.166', Nov. – Dec. 1997, (pp.31-32).

**APPENDIX 1. TABLES****Table 1: Religious Changes in West Africa 1900 – 1990**

	Traditionalists	Christians	Muslims
	1900 – 1990	1900 – 1990	1900 – 1990
Mauritania	2 – 0.1	0 – 0.5	98 – 99
Mali	70 – 15	0.1 – 2.3	30 – 82
Niger	55 – 10	0 – 0.34	5 – 90
Burkina Faso	90 – 35	0 – 15	10 – 50
Senegal	28 – 2	2 – 6	70 – 92
Gambia	15 – 10	4 – 4	81 – 85
Cape Verde	0 – 0	99 – 98	0 – 0
Guinea-Bissau	81 – 49	4 – 11	15 – 40
Guinea	42 – 26	0.2 – 1.3	58 – 72
Sierra Leone	85 – 49	4.5 – 9	10 – 41
Liberia	87 – 53(39)	10 – 23(37)	2 – 23
Ivory Coast	95 – 42(39)	0 – 32(35)	5 – 26
Ghana	90 – 35(14)	5 – 48(69)	5 – 17
Togo	95 – 39(36)	1 – 40(43)	4 – 20
Benin	92 – 58(55)	1 – 24(27)	7 – 16
Nigeria	73 – 20(8)	1 – 35(47)	25 – 45
<b>All West</b>			
<b>Africa in %</b>	<b>73.2 – 13.9</b>	<b>1.8 – 36.4</b>	<b>25 – 47.8</b>
<b>in millions</b>	<b>20.5m – 23m</b>	<b>0.5m – 60m</b>	<b>7m – 79m</b>

Figures in brackets include the nominal Christians projected from 1970 to 1990; they lower the figures for the Traditionalists correspondingly. Their actual number by now is difficult to assess. (Figures based on WCE.)

**Source:** John, Baur, *Two thousand Years of Christianity in Africa* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), (Nairobi, Pauline Publications Africa, 1998), p.264.

Table 2: African Christians recorded by Churches in 1994

COUNTRIES	TOTAL MEMBERS	%	CATHOLICS	%	NON-CATHOLICS	%
ALL AFRICA	252,000,000	38.0%	102,000,000	15.5%	150,000,000	22.5%
WEST AFRICA	50,000,000	28.0%	19,000,000	10.5%	31,000,000	17.5%
Mauritania	5,000	0.3%	4,500	0.2%	500	0.1%
Mali	200,000	2.0%	150,000	1.5%	50,000	0.5%
Niger	25,000	0.3%	8,000	0.2%	7,000	0.1%
Burkina Faso	1,200,000	15.0%	950,000	11.9%	250,000	3.1%
Senegal	410,000	5.1%	400,000	5.0%	10,000	0.1%
Gambia	32,000	3.4%	22,000	2.4%	10,000	1.0%
Cape Verde	370,000	97.3%	350,000	92.1%	20,000	5.2%
Guinea-Bissau	82,000	7.5%	75,000	6.8%	7,000	0.7%
Guinea	150,000	2.0%	140,000	1.8%	10,000	0.2%
Sierra Leone	440,000	9.7%	113,000	2.5%	325,000	7.2%
Liberia	710,000	26.3%	90,000	3.3%	620,000	23.0%
Ivory Coast	3,000,000	24.0%	1,750,000	14.0%	1,250,000	10.8%
Ghana	7,600,000	46.0%	2,150,000	13.0%	5,450,000	33.0%
Togo	1,300,000	33.3%	1,050,000	26.5%	250,000	6.4%
Benin	1,370,000	27.4%	1,150,000	23.8%	220,000	4.4%
Nigeria	33,800,000	35.2%	10,700,000	11.1%	23,100,000	24.0%
EASTERN AFRICA	107,000,000	52.0%	42,000,000	20.0%	65,000,000	52.0%
Eritrea	1,750,000	50%	100,000	2.8%	1,650,000	47.2%
Ethiopia	23,600,000	53.0%	300,000	0.7%	23,300,000	32.4%
Djibouti	10,000	7.3%	9,000	6.5%	1,000	0.8%
Somalia	500	0.1%	200	0.1%	300	0.1%
Kenya	18,400,000	69.4%	3,900,000	22.2%	12,500,000	47.2%
Uganda	14,800,800	70.0%	8,500,000	42.5%	5,500,000	27.5%
Tanzania	12,000,000	42.1%	6,500,000	22.8%	3,500,000	19.3%
Rwanda	4,900,000	65.3%	3,600,000	48.0%	1,300,000	17.3%
Burundi	4,250,000	70.8%	3,800,000	63.3%	450,000	7.5%
Malawi	5,700,000	67.0%	2,100,000	24.7%	3,600,000	42.3%
Zambia	6,400,000	71.1%	2,500,000	27.8%	3,900,000	43.3%
Zimbabwe	5,200,000	52.0%	1,200,000	12.0%	4,000,000	40.0%
Mozambique	3,700,800	22.4%	2,500,000	15.2%	1,200,000	7.2%
Madagascar	6,000,000	48.0%	3,000,800	24.0%	3,000,000	24.0%
Mauritius	330,000	27.5%	300,000	25.0%	30,000	2.5%
Reunion	555,000	85.4%	350,000	84.6%	5,000	0.8%
Comoros	1,100	0.2%	600	0.1%	500	0.1%
Seychelles	88,800	88.8%	80,800	80.0%	8,000	8.0%
CENTRAL AFRICA	53,000,000	70.7%	34,800,800	45.0%	19,000,000	26.0%
Cameroon	5,900,000	49.1%	4,000,000	53.3%	1,900,000	15.8%
Equat. Guinea	370,000	92.5%	350,000	87.5%	20,000	5.0%
Sao Tomé & Principe	110,000	88.8%	105,000	84.0%	5,000	4.0%
Gabon	975,000	78.0%	650,000	52.0%	325,000	26.0%
Conogo	1,600,000	69.5%	1,000,000	43.4%	600,000	26.1%
Central Africa Republic	1,600,000	46.9%	700,000	20.3%	900,000	26.6%
Chad	950,000	15.8%	450,000	7.5%	500,000	8.3%
Zaire	34,000,000	85.0%	20,000,000	50.8%	14,000,000	35.0%
Angola	7,850,000	74.8%	6,500,000	62.8%	1,350,000	12.8%
NORTHERN AFR	12,000,000	7.7%	2,000,000	1.3%	10,000,000	6.5%
Morocco	40,800	0.2%	30,800	0.1%	10,000	0.1%
Algeria	40,000	0.2%	30,000	0.1%	10,000	0.1%
Tunisia	20,000	0.2%	15,000	0.1%	5,000	0.1%
Libya	55,000	1.2%	40,800	0.9%	15,000	0.3%
Egypt	9,000,000	5.3%	200,000	0.3%	8,800,000	15.0%
Sudan	3,500,000	12.0%	2,000,000	7.3%	1,500,000	4.7%
SOUTHERN AFR	30,800,000	65.0%	5,000,000	11.0%	25,000,000	55.0%
South Africa	26,000,000	66.6%	3,500,000	9.0%	22,500,000	37.6%
Lesotho	1,550,000	77.5%	800,000	40.0%	750,000	37.5%
Swaziland	450,000	56.3%	55,000	6.9%	395,000	49.4%
Botswana	450,000	32.1%	60,000	4.3%	390,000	27.8%
Namibia	1,200,000	63.1%	230,000	15.8%	900,000	47.3%
YEAR 2000						
All Africa	300,000,000	39.2%	120,000,800	15.7%	180,000,000	23.5%

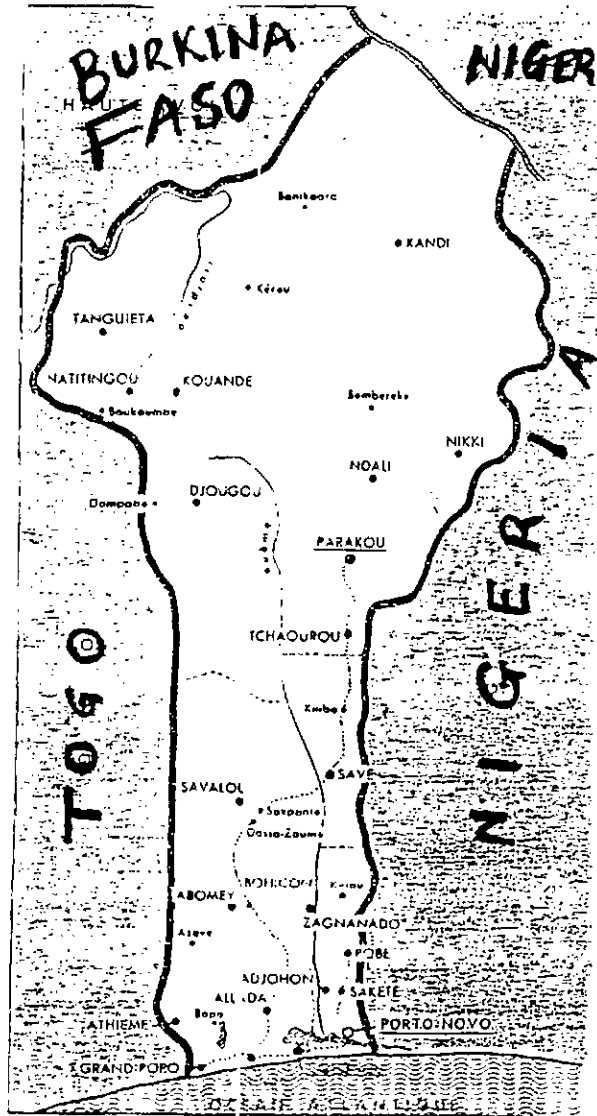
Source: John, Baur, *Two thousand Years of Christianity in Africa* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), (Nairobi, Pauline Publications Africa, 1998), pp. 540-541.

Table 3 : Pubic Census and Polls in 1994

COUNTRIES	CHRISTIANS	MUSLIMS	TRADITIONAL REL.	POPULATION
ALL AFRICA	291,000,000 44.0%	289,000,000 42.0%	44,000,000 14.0%	665,000,000
WEST AFRICA	55,000,000 54.4%	64,000,000 49.7%	30,000,000 15.8%	189,000,000
Mauritania	5,000 0.2%	2,000,000 99.8%	500 0.1%	2,000,000
Mali	2,000,000 2.0%	8,000,000 84.0%	1,000,000 14.0%	10,000,000
Niger	25,000 0.5%	7,000,000 91.0%	700,000 9.0%	8,000,000
Burkina Faso	1,500,000 18.0%	7,000,000 87.0%	3,000,000 30.0%	8,000,000
Senegal	450,000 5.6%	7,000,000 93.7%	1,000,000 1.4%	8,000,000
Gambia	42,000 3.4%	850,000 80.5%	70,000 7.4%	950,000
Cape Verde	570,000 97.0%	—	—	580,000
Guinea-Bissau	45,000 7.7%	450,000 80.9%	60,000 10.4%	580,000
Guinea	150,000 2%	6,000,000 80.2%	1,500,000 18.0%	7,500,000
Sierra Leone	450,000 10.0%	3,000,000 62.2%	2,500,000 47.8%	4,500,000
Liberia	1,000,000 37.0%	1,000,000 35.0%	950,000 35.2%	2,700,000
Ivory Coast	3,300,000 25.0%	4,000,000 30.0%	4,800,000 38.4%	12,500,000
Ghana	11,000,000 66.6%	2,000,000 17.0%	2,500,000 16.4%	16,500,000
Togo	1,400,000 15.0%	7,000,000 80.5%	1,700,000 18.6%	9,500,000
Benin	1,550,000 27.0%	4,000,000 68.0%	2,750,000 55.0%	5,000,000
Nigeria	44,000,000 45.8%	44,000,000 45.8%	8,000,000 8.4%	96,000,000
EASTERN AFRICA	118,000,000 58.7%	40,000,000 19.0%	43,000,000 21.3%	2,000,000,000
Eritrea	1,750,000 50%	1,000,000 49.5%	2,000,000 5%	3,500,000
Ethiopia	25,500,000 57.4%	15,000,000 33.7%	4,000,000 9.0%	44,500,000
Debutai	70,000 2.2%	600,000 97.7%	—	4,000,000
Kenya	5,000 0.1%	1,500,000 99.9%	—	5,000,000
Kenya	20,500,000 77.4%	1,000,000 3.0%	4,200,000 15.8%	26,500,000
Uganda	18,000,000 80.0%	2,000,000 7.0%	2,500,000 12.9%	22,500,000
Tanzania	12,000,000 42.1%	15,000,000 53.3%	7,000,000 24.6%	28,500,000
Rwanda	3,500,000 73.3%	1,000,000 20.0%	1,500,000 30.0%	4,800,000
Burundi	3,400,000 90.0%	400,000 10.0%	700,000 17.5%	3,800,000
Mozambique	6,000,000 70.0%	2,000,000 23.0%	1,000,000 11.0%	8,500,000
Zambia	7,400,000 82.2%	10,000 0.1%	1,000,000 11.7%	9,000,000
Zimbabwe	4,700,000 57.0%	3,000,000 37.0%	4,200,000 51.0%	8,200,000
Mozambique	4,200,000 25.5%	2,000,000 12.1%	10,000,000 62.4%	16,500,000
Malagascar	3,700,000 53.0%	3,000,000 41.0%	5,000,000 68.0%	7,000,000
Mauritius	450,000 29.2%	2,000,000 12.6%	650,000 41.2%	1,500,000
Reunion	550,000 95.0%	15,000 2.5%	1,000 0.1%	580,000
Comoros	1,100 0.7%	60,000 98.2%	—	150,000
Seychelles	60,000 98.0%	500 0.7%	1,000 1.5%	61,500
S.A.I				
CENTRAL AFRICA	59,000,000 78.0%	7,000,000 9.3%	9,000,000 12.0%	75,000,000
Cameroun	4,000,000 56.0%	4,000,000 55.0%	2,200,000 29.0%	7,200,000
Equat. Guinea	170,000 92.0%	5,000 2.5%	25,000 13.0%	185,000
San Tome & Principe	15,000 92.0%	—	1,000 6.0%	16,000
Gabon	2,000,000 80.0%	500 0.8%	24,000 9.2%	2,500,000
Congo	2,000,000 91.0%	15,000 0.6%	185,000 8.0%	2,200,000
Central Africa Rep	2,400,000 78.1%	1,000,000 3.1%	600,000 18.8%	3,000,000
Chad	1,400,000 25.0%	4,000,000 70.0%	1,500,000 25.0%	5,600,000
Zaire	50,000,000 90.0%	7,000,000 11.0%	3,500,000 5.5%	55,500,000
Angola	1,200,000 87.0%	—	1,500,000 12.4%	1,380,000
NORTHERN AFR	15,000,000 8.5%	150,000,000 89.0%	4,000,000 2.5%	155,000,000
Morocco	40,000 0.5%	27,000,000 99.5%	—	27,000,000
Algeria	40,000 0.5%	27,000,000 99.5%	—	27,000,000
Tunisia	25,000 0.3%	8,500,000 99.7%	—	8,525,000
Libya	55,000 2.1%	4,000,000 97.7%	—	4,055,000
Egypt	9,000,000 17.0%	5,000,000 82.2%	—	52,000,000
Sudan	4,000,000 20.0%	20,000,000 75.0%	4,000,000 15.0%	28,000,000
SOUTHERN AFR	66,000,000 80.0%	500,000 0.6%	8,000,000 10.0%	82,500,000
South Africa	42,000,000 82.0%	500,000 1.0%	6,500,000 12.4%	51,000,000
Zimbabwe	1,500,000 85.0%	1,000 0.0%	200,000 11.0%	1,700,000
Botswana	600,000 75.0%	500 0.1%	200,000 25.0%	800,000
Lesotho	750,000 55.0%	—	650,000 48.0%	1,400,000
Namibia	1,250,000 65.0%	—	650,000 34.0%	1,900,000
YEAR 2000				
ALL AFRICA	550,000,000 45%	470,000,000 43%	85,000,000 11%	1,105,000,000

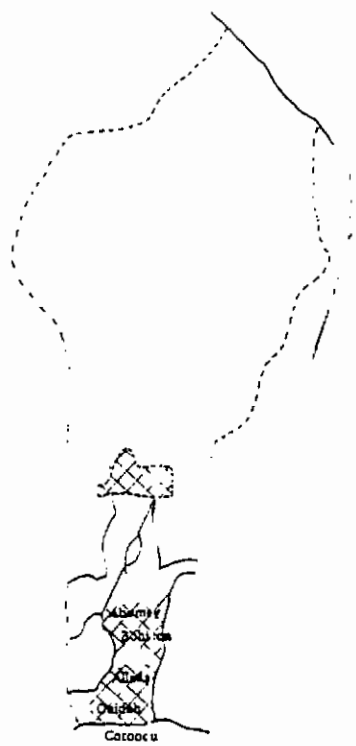
Source: John. Baur, *Two thousand Years of Christianity in Africa* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), (Nairobi, Pauline Publications Africa, 1998), pp.542-543

**APPENDIX 2 MAPS**

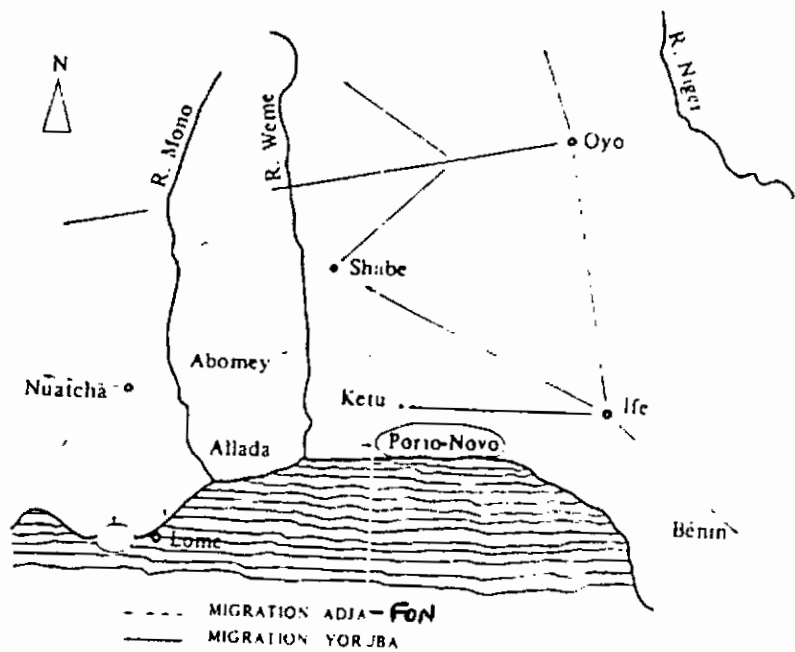


**Map 1 : The Republic of Benin**

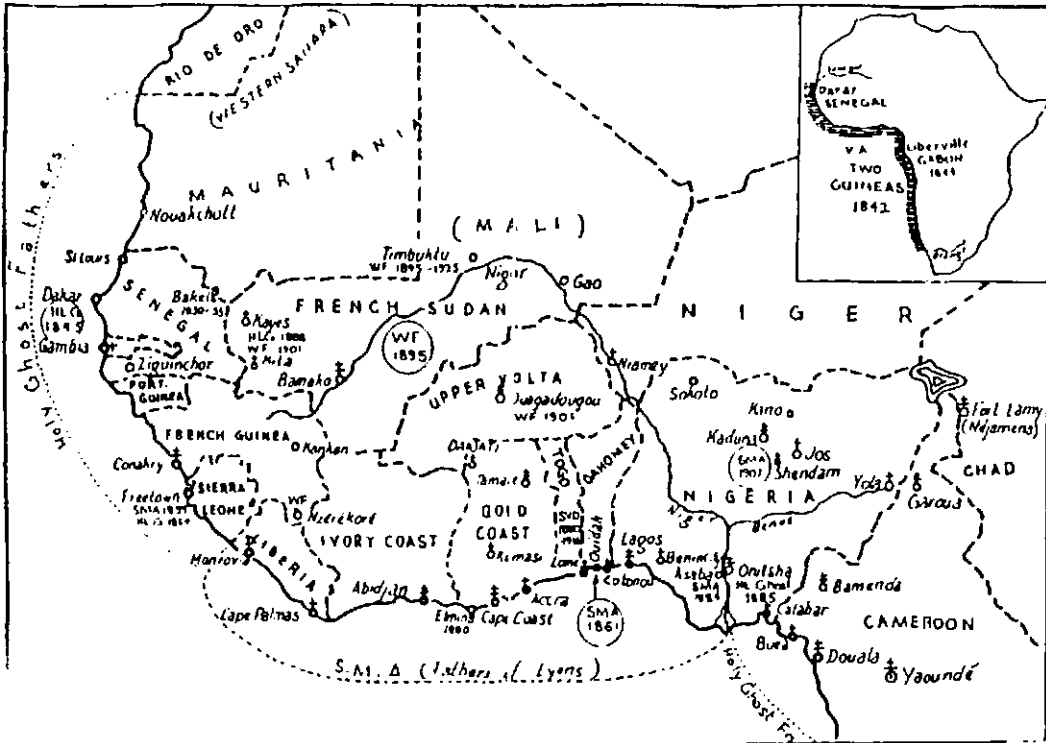
Map 2: The location of the Adja –Fon in Benin (Source: Barthelemy A., Op. cit. P VIII)



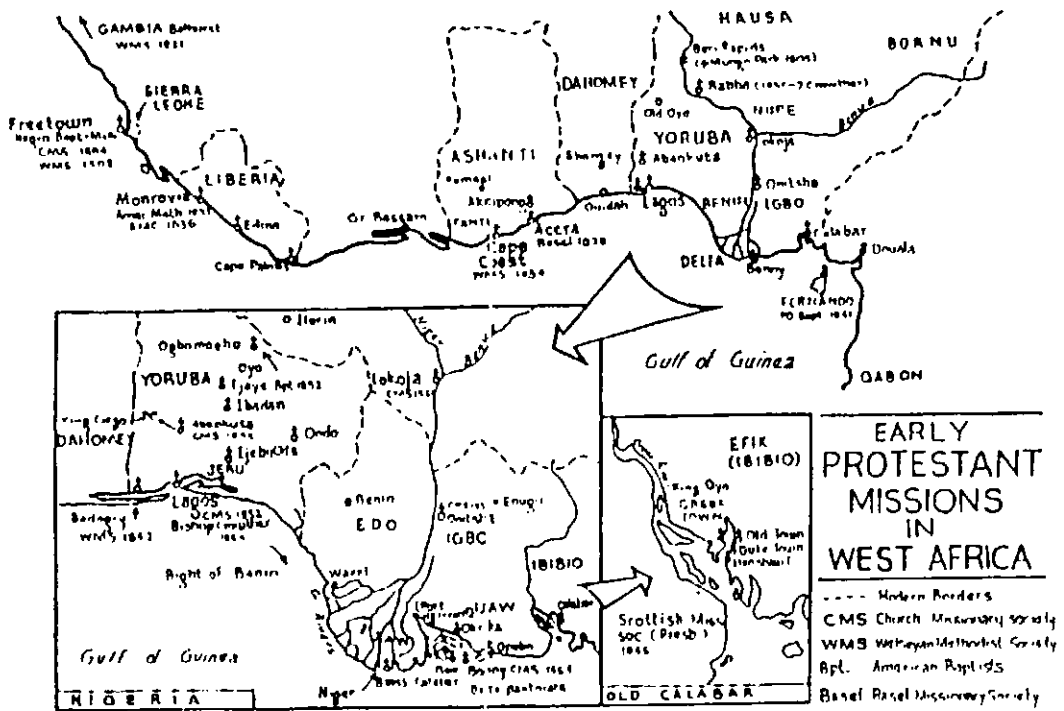
Map 3 : The Migration of the Adja-Fon from Nuatcha (Tado) (Source: Ibid., p. XVII)



Map 4: West Africa Catholic Foundations ( Source: John Baur, Op. cit., p.451 )



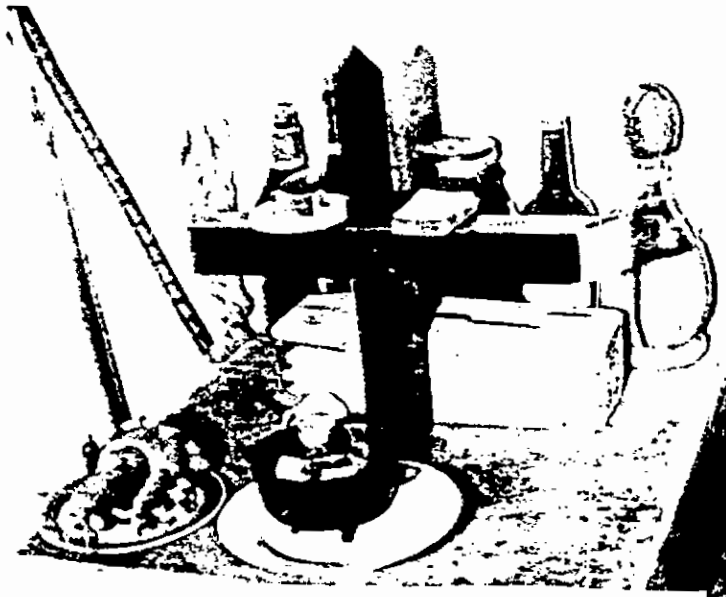
Map 5: Protestants Pioneer Missions in W/Africa (Source: Ibid., p.450)



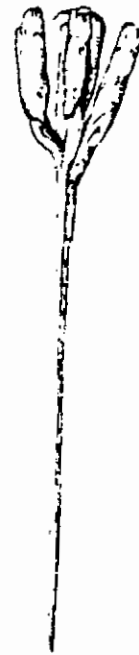
**APPENDIX 3 : PICTURES**



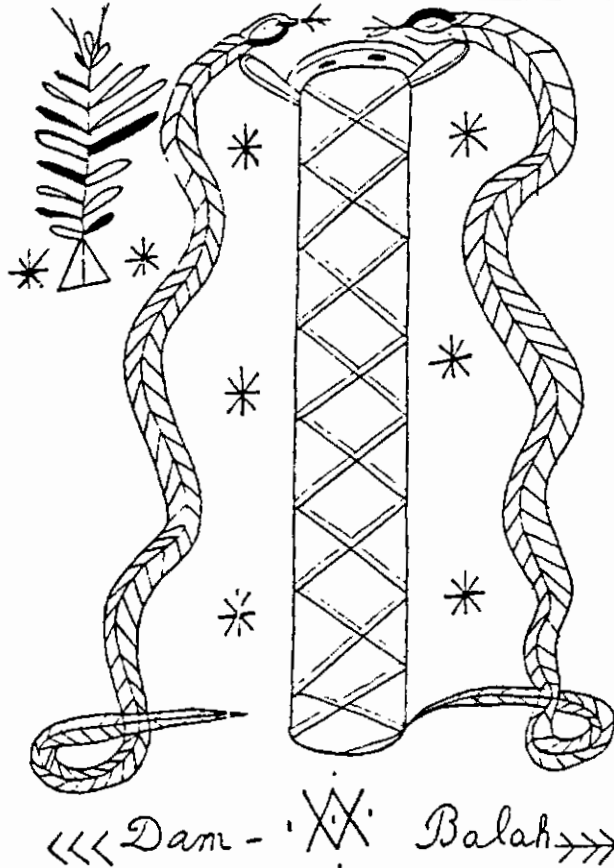
Picture 1: Sanctuary of a Voodoo god (Source : Robert Cornevin, Op. cit., p.255)



Picture 2 : Altar consecrated to the Voodoo god 'Gou'  
(Source: Alfred Métraux, Op. Cit., p.195)



Picture 3: Two supports for ritual objects (Source: Ibid., p.



Picture 4 : Symbol of the Voodoo god 'Dan' (Source: Alfred Métraux, Op. cit., p.37)



Picture 5: A Rite of the Voodoo god 'Dan' (Source: Bruno Gilli, Op. Cit., p.231)



Picture 6: A Novice of the Voodoo god 'Dan' during Initiation

(Source: Ibid.)



Picture 7: Alter of the twin god (Source: Bruno Gilli, Op. Cit., p. 232)



Picture 8 : The first stages of a Spirit Possession ( Source: Alfred M., p.195)



Picture 9 : A Houngan twirling the Hounsi standard-bearer  
( Alfred Métraux, Op. Cit., p.196 )



Picture 10 : A Houngan possessed by a Voodoo spirit  
dances round the central post of his sanctuary  
( Source: Alfred M., p.197 )



Picture 11: A Hounsi kissing the ground before a dance (Source: Ibid., p. 196)



Picture 12 : A Voodoo Dance ( Source: Alfred M., p.198)

---

## APPENDIX 4 INFORMANTS

**ASSOGBA Didier**, 31 Years old, is a Secondary School teacher and a fervent Christian Catholic.

**AVOCE Emile**, 26 Years old, is a Christian Celestial Church Priest serving at **Zê Parish** of and a former adept of the Voodoo god '**Gou**'

**AVOCE Gerard**, 29 Years old, is a member of the Christian Celestial Church **Zê Parish**, and a former adept of the Voodoo god '**Gou**'

**DOUNON Eloi**, 29 Years old, is also a Secondary School Teacher and a fervent Christian Catholic

**GANKPA Gabin**, 27 Years old, is a member of St Benoit Catholic Church Toffo, and a former adept of the Voodoo god '**Zangbeto**'.

**GANKPA Lekotan Houedanou**, 61 Years old, is a farmer and an adherent of the Voodoo god '**Sakpata**'

**GBEDO Emile**, 31 Years old is a convert member of the Baptist Church and a former adherent of the Voodoo god '**Egoun**'.